

Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”

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April 2018

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Masterworks #7: Copland & Gershwin | April 6-8, 2018

Two “Brooklyn boys,” inspired by the sounds of jazz in the early 20th century, traveled different paths, but each created distinctly “American” music.



Two of America’s most defining classical composers, George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, began with much in common. They were born just two years apart (Gershwin in 1898,¹ Copland in 1900²) to Jewish families in Brooklyn, New York.³ By their teenage years, each was inspired by the jazz sounds of America in the early-twentieth century.⁴ And both later found themselves in 1920s Paris, a vibrant, artistic world that inspired the two artists in vastly different ways.

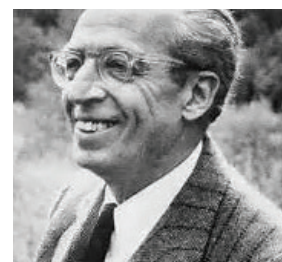
Both Copland and Gershwin were fascinated by music from a young age, and by the age of 15, each had decided to forge a career in music. Fifteen-year-old Copland decided he would become a composer,⁵ while a 15-year-old Gershwin dropped out of school to work as a pianist in the New York nightclubs, while simultaneously making piano rolls for player pianos.⁶ Copland’s family encouraged him to travel to Paris at



George Gershwin and brother, Ira Gershwin

the age of 21 to further his music studies, but such a luxury was beyond the reach of Gershwin who, by the age of 18, was working full-time as a ‘Tin Pan Alley tunesmith,’ recording, re-arranging and composing, making a name for himself as a popular composer.⁷

While Gershwin worked in the studios of New York City’s music publishers gaining on-the-job training in transposition and improvisation, Copland was accepted to study with the famed Nadia Boulanger, who was teaching in the Palais de Fontainebleau, a new school specifically for American musicians.⁸ Studying with a female mentor was unconventional, but Copland and Boulanger developed such a close bond that Copland’s plan to study in France “for a summer” was extended to three years.⁹



Aaron Copland

Boulanger tutored many American musicians, constantly reiterating her philosophy of “get tough, get serious.”¹⁰ In Copland’s work, she recognized a unique American sound, inspired by his upbringing on the streets of Brooklyn during the rise of jazz. She encouraged him to use his upbringing to develop a style different from the great European composers of the time.¹¹ Copland greatly respected Boulanger, the first woman to conduct the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra.¹²

Gershwin, already an accomplished and acclaimed composer, set out for France in 1926, with the dream of working with the French composer Maurice Ravel, famous for *Bolero*, and recognized for his proficiency in utilizing harmony and tone.¹³

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Already a great fan of Gershwin's works such as *Rhapsody in Blue*, Ravel refused to accept Gershwin as a student, questioning the young composer, "Why be a second-rate Ravel when you can be a first-rate Gershwin?"¹⁴ Gershwin, who produced a sound even more distinctly jazz-inspired than Copland, was similarly rejected by other Parisian music teachers, including Nadia Boulanger.¹⁵ She believed that European-style training would actually ruin George's natural flair for jazz.¹⁶ It is fascinating that both Ravel and Boulanger rejected Gershwin as a pupil precisely because they valued Gershwin's genius, and worried that the special qualities of his unique style would be detrimentally altered by the more rigid classical influences.¹⁷

Despite the rejections by Ravel and Boulanger, Gershwin opted to remain in Paris, and while there, composed his Piano Concerto in F, followed by *An American in Paris* in 1928, a piece inspired by the sights and sounds of the French capitol. The latter composition was premiered at Carnegie Hall in late 1928 to great acclaim, hailed as the "American *Afternoon of a Faun*" by critic Isaac Goldberg.¹⁸



During his time in France, Copland embraced the Parisian lifestyle. He took lessons in French culture and language at the Sorbonne and attended the plays of Chekhov, Shaw, and Wilde.¹⁹ Copland was one of the first of many American artists to settle in Montparnasse, which became the intellectual and artistic center of Paris in the 1920s, where figures such as Gertrude Stein, E.E. Cummings, Ernest Hemingway, Sinclair Lewis, Pablo Picasso, Diego Rivera, Erik Satie, and Salvador Dali lived as neighbors.²⁰

An avid reader, Copland made certain to use his time absorbing French culture and the art scene that dominated Paris. He frequently visited Shakespeare and Company, the bookstore of

American expatriate, Sylvia Beach, where he confronted the literary achievements of his fellow artists.²¹ Copland first read one of his favorite books, *Ulysses*, at Shakespeare and Company, and was later delighted to meet the author, James Joyce, at the store.²² Copland enjoyed encounters with his neighbor, Ernest Hemingway.²³ Conversations with leading intellectual figures of the time expanded Copland's influences, helping him develop a sound that reflected a mixture of American jazz and Parisian bohemianism. Copland thrived during his time in Paris, and returned to the United States in 1924 as a well-learned young musician, excited about his future.²⁴



Copland and Gershwin are two definitive examples of an evolving sound in American music. While Copland was shaped by the training he received in Paris, his music (such as *Billy The Kid* and *Appalachian Spring*) reflects a uniquely American sound. Gershwin, rejected by two master teachers in France, was encouraged to retain the compelling jazz influences that flowed through his music. Similar in background but with vastly different training, the works of both composers represent the best of 20th century American music.

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for a thrilling performance of the music of **Copland & Gershwin, April 6 - 8, 2018**, and be prepared to respond with enthusiasm that will lift you out of your seat!

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Wondering How the Music Will Sound?

Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Copland's *Outdoor Overture* was written in 1938 for a performance at New York's High School of Music & Art, as part of the school's mission to focus on American music for American youth. This video is a performance by Leonard Bernstein and the NY Philharmonic, during one of the famous Young People's Concerts:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDoBctGwv4Q>

Billy the Kid Suite, also written in 1938, was the first of the Americana ballets. This is a performance of Eugene Ormandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fbVpss8ftE>

Watch an exciting performance of Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F by Yuja Wang, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDxKtkkbE7w>

Enjoy the performance of *Rainbow Body* by Christopher Theofanidis, performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Robert Spano:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrgReGYKg3U>

Hungry to hear more Gershwin & Copland?

Watch Yuja Wang perform Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCTp2NkgOxl>

For fun, compare it with a performance of the same piece by Leonard Bernstein and the NY Philharmonic, listening to different interpretations by Wang and Bernstein, as well as the famous clarinet opening:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cH2PH0auTUU>

Here is Leonard Slatkin conducting the Detroit Symphony, performing Copland's *Appalachian Spring*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMaAe2aH6pw>

And watch the master, Aaron Copland, conducting the NY Philharmonic in a performance of his own *El Salon Mexico*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj-g8yBfEIo>

"TO STOP THE FLOW OF MUSIC WOULD BE LIKE THE STOPPING OF TIME ITSELF, INCREDIBLE AND INCONCEIVABLE."

AARON COPLAND

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The return of Casey's Classics

Recommended recordings for your listening pleasure!

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program?

Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured on our upcoming Masterworks Concert:

Aaron Copland's *Outdoor Overture* and the ballet *Billy the Kid* are perfectly caught by Andrew Litton and the Colorado Symphony (BIS), who even manage to supplant the classic Bernstein/New York Philharmonic recordings of this composer (SONY).

Andre Previn on piano and the much under-valued conductor Andre Kostelanetz combine forces to capture to perfection the jazzy classicism of Gershwin's Piano Concerto in F, where the performers do not overinflate the music.

Theofanides' *Rainbow Body* is nicely performed by Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony on a well-engineered recording from TELARC.

¹ Adam, Peter. "George Gershwin Remembered." *American Masters*, Public Broadcasting System, 7 June 2006, www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/george-gershwin-about-the-composer/65/.

² Boosey & Hawkes. "About Aaron Copland." *The Aaron Copland Fund for Music*. The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, 2017, coplandfund.org/about.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/george-gershwin-328.php>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Thomas, Michael Tilson. "Copland and the American Sound." *Keeping Score*, Public Broadcasting Service, 2009, www.pbs.org/keepingscore/copland-american-sound.html.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Machlis, Joseph. "Aaron Copland." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 4 Dec. 2016, www.britannica.com/biography/Aaron-Copland#ref178798.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ "An American Lost in Paris: Gershwin Navigating the Classical Sphere." The Gershwin Initiative Website. September 10, 2013. <http://smt.d.umich.edu/ami/gershwin/?p=987>.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/george-gershwin-328.php>

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ <http://www.americaninparisbroadway.com/history/>

¹⁹ Pollack, Howard. *Aaron Copland: the Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*. London: Faber, 2000.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Machlis, Joseph. "Aaron Copland." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 4 Dec. 2016, www.britannica.com/biography/Aaron-Copland#ref178798.