

JULY 25 & 26—GRAND FINALE REHEARSAL & CONCERT

Saturday, July 25, 2009, 10 AM - 1 PM

Christopher Cohan Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo

Appalachian Spring (orchestral suite)

Aaron COPLAND

Billy the Kid, Rodeo, Appalachian Spring—it is somewhat ironic that some of the best-loved pieces that seem to capture the American pioneer spirit came from a Brooklyn-born composer, descended from Russian Jews, whose direct experience with the American frontier was virtually non-existent. It is a credit to Aaron Copland's imagination—and to the imaginations of his collaborators—that he was able to write vivid and evocative music for people and situations he had never encountered.

It certainly helped that Martha Graham, choreographer of *Appalachian Spring*, did have first-hand memories of her grandparents' Pennsylvania farm. The chance to use these recollections as a foundation for a ballet resulted from a lucky circumstance; the noted arts patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge attended a dance recital by Graham in 1942 and was so impressed that she promised a three-ballet commission to Graham, with the choice of composers left to Graham herself. Graham offered the third of the ballets to Copland; she had been a long-time admirer of his work, and had already choreographed one of his keyboard compositions more than a decade earlier. She gave Copland the general scenario she had in mind—that of a young couple marrying and facing the daunting task of building a frontier home. Copland set to work, composing much of the piece while in California to write film scores, but he finished the ballet in Massachusetts while lecturing at Harvard.

The first page of Copland's score read "Ballet for Martha," for Graham had never given him a title. Finally, the day before the ballet's debut at the Library of Congress, Graham recalled a line from a poem by Hart Crane, *The Bridge*. In a section titled (appropriately enough) "The Dance," Crane had used the phrase "O Appalachian Spring," and Graham felt that it expressed the essence of the movement and music that they had crafted. Most of Copland's score was original, but for the seventh of its eight sections, he borrowed a traditional Shaker tune, "Simple Gifts"; he used it as the basis for five variations that are, for many people, the highlight of the work.

Piano Concerto in a minor, op. 16

Edvard GRIEG

Some people go mountain climbing every year, while others scale Mt. Everest only once in their lives. For Grieg, the *Piano Concerto, Op. 16*—begun at age 25—was his "Everest"; he made a start at a second piano concerto when he was 40, but gave up after sketching two movements, telling his publisher, "Pegasus wouldn't budge." Grieg had to content himself with a lasting reputation based on that first piano concerto (along with various other masterpieces, such as the *Peer Gynt Suites*, the *Norwegian Dances* and the song *Ich liebe dich* ("I Love You").

Grieg continued to tinker with the A minor piano concerto all through his life. Franz Liszt had, early on, given Grieg some orchestration suggestions, but Grieg gradually excised much of the Hungarian's more flamboyant ideas. Grieg was still fiddling with the work a few months before he died, resulting in the addition of two more horn parts, among other changes. The impact of the dramatic opening remained the same, however; the timpani sweep us forward into the first powerful appearance of the piano, which cascades downward over the length of the keyboard. For listeners, the concerto alternates between sensations of downhill and cross-country skiing: there are peaceful, lyrical sections in between the brilliant and thrilling fanfares. Grieg might have been able to climb the mountain only once—but what a legacy he left behind!

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, op. 68 "Pastorale"

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN

When Beethoven presented his *Symphony No. 6 in F, Op. 68*, he did several things he had never done before, nor would ever do again: he included a fifth movement within what was normally a four-movement structure, he wrote programmatic descriptions of each movement, and he allowed a subtitle—"Pastoral"—to be added to the title of the work. Beethoven cautioned his listeners that these descriptions were "more an expression of feeling than painting"; in other words, he was trying to capture the moods of the various scenes rather than presenting a sound-by-sound depiction of events.

Beethoven's innovations did not receive as much initial reaction as we might expect. For one thing, he was not the first to write programmatic orchestral music; Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* had been published over 80 years earlier. The circumstances of the premiere might also have contributed: the program, presented on a bitterly cold December evening, also contained Beethoven's fifth symphony, his fourth piano concerto, parts of the *Mass in C*, the hastily written *Choral Fantasy*, the concert aria "*Ah! perfido*," and keyboard improvisations. Listeners probably had little energy left to admire the slow build-up of the sixth symphony's first movement, the charming bird calls in the second movement, the rustic village band in the third, the fourth movement's dramatic storm, or the Elysian serenity of the finale.

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