

AARON COPLAND

Born 14 November 1900 in Brooklyn, New York; died 2 December 1990 in North Tarrytown, New York.

Suite from *Appalachian Spring* (1943-1944)

PREMIERE OF BALLET: Washington, D.C., 30 October 1944; Library of Congress; Louis Horst, conductor

PREMIERE OF SUITE: New York, 18 April 1945; Carnegie Hall; New York Philharmonic; Artur Rodzinski, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 09 November 1945; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 24 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds, horns, trumpets and trombones in pairs, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings.

Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, one of America's greatest patrons of the arts, went to see a dance recital by Martha Graham in 1942. So taken with the genius of the dancer-choreographer was Mrs. Coolidge that she offered to have three ballets specially composed for her. Miss Graham chose as composers of the music Darius Milhaud, Paul Hindemith and an American whose work she had admired for over a decade — Aaron Copland. In 1931, Miss Graham had staged Copland's *Piano Variations* as the ballet *Dithyramb*, and she was eager to have another dance piece from him, especially in view of his recent successes with *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. She devised a scenario based on her memories of her grandmother's farm in turn-of-the-20th-century Pennsylvania, and it proved to be a perfect match for the direct, quintessentially American style that Copland espoused in those years. Edwin Denby's description of the ballet's action from his review of the New York premiere in May 1945 was reprinted in the published score:

"[The ballet concerns] a pioneer celebration in spring around a newly built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the 19th century. The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, their new domestic partnership invites. An older neighbor suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end, the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house."

The premiere of *Appalachian Spring* (Miss Graham borrowed the title from a poem by Hart Crane, though the content of the poem has no relation to the stage work) was given on October 30, 1944 (in honor of Mrs. Coolidge's 80th birthday) in the auditorium of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where the limited space in the theater allowed Copland to use a chamber orchestra of only thirteen instruments (flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano and nine strings). The performance was repeated in New York in May to great acclaim, and garnered the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Music and the New York Music Critics Circle Award as the outstanding theatrical work of the 1944-1945 season. Soon after its New York premiere, Copland revised the score as a suite of eight continuous sections for full orchestra by eliminating about eight minutes of music in which, he said, "the interest is primarily choreographic."