

# Fanfare for Copland, Who Wasn't Always a Common Man

By JEREMY EICHLER

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y., Aug. 21 — Aaron Copland espoused a creed of Shaker simplicity. The hymn he set in "Appalachian Spring" begins with the words "'Tis the gift to be simple." When asked in 1937 about his role in the music of his time, he replied "to write something that is simple, yet very good."

True to his pledge, his most famous populist works are written in a straightforward and direct style, with a restless rhythmic energy that seemed native born and a palette of harmonies that were lean yet open. It was music both proud and frugal, like the midcentury America he came to symbolize.

Yet just how simple was Aaron Copland? The question wafted through a densely packed three days of programs at Bard College over the weekend. It was the second half of the Bard Music Festival's annual Rediscoveries series, devoted this year to "Aaron Copland and His World." As in past years, the festival mixed orchestral and chamber concerts with supplementary events like panels, preconcert talks and even documentary films, placing the composer's achievement in a rich web of context.

Bard's formula seemed tailor-made for a figure like Copland, whose output remains little known by most listeners beyond the few works that made him famous. The festival dug deeper, not only by presenting the jazz-infused Copland, the early modernist Copland and the very unsimple 12-tone Copland but also by trying to integrate these disparate faces into a single whole with that elusive ring of unity.

The festival is sensibly premised on the notion that a composer's choices are best understood when placed against the backdrop of his times. So Copland's music was often a minority presence on individual programs. Friday night at the Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, the only Copland work was "El Salón México," performed in Bernstein's two-piano arrangement by Blanca Uribe and Richard Wilson. The rest of the program was devoted to concert music of Latin and South America, where Copland traveled extensively, gaining inspiration not only to integrate folk melodies into his music but also to reimagine the social possibilities of his art.

The Daedalus Quartet gave polished and vigorous readings of string



Richard Termine for The New York Times

Curtis Macomber playing Mario Davidovsky's "Synchronisms" No. 9.

quartets by Revueltas and Villa-Lobos, and Ms. Uribe returned for a blistering performance of Ginastera's "Danzas Argentinas." But it was the work most peripheral to the program's theme that made the strongest impression: Mario Davidovsky's "Synchronisms" No. 9 pitted Curtis Macomber's solo violin against a re-

## A composer more than the sum of his all-American image.

corded tape track in an exhilarating electro-acoustic exchange.

A program on Saturday afternoon in Olin Hall brought a survey of mostly 1940's Neo-Classicism, works you almost never hear by Walter Piston, Paul Bowles, Irving Fine and others. Elliott Carter's Woodwind Quintet stood out in this company, with its thickly woven counterpoint and whirling centrifugal energy persuasively conveyed by the Bard Conservatory Woodwind Quintet. David Diamond's String Quartet No. 1, by contrast, came off as airless and heavy, which helped a listener appreciate Carter's ingenuity, not to mention the clean and graceful lines of

Copland's Violin Sonata, also on the program.

Leon Botstein led the American Symphony Orchestra in concerts on Saturday and Sunday nights. The first charted Copland's move toward popular appeal, from the transitional work "Statements" to the vivid pictorialism of "Billy the Kid" and "Quiet City." These works were framed by other forays into accessible mass concert music by Jerome Kern, Elie Siegmeister, Samuel Barber and Roy Harris.

The comparative approach was particularly effective in Sunday night's program, which opened with short fanfares by Harris, Piston, William Grant Still and Henry Cowell. We are often reminded how music was yoked to the war effort in Germany and in the Soviet Union, but these fanfares were all commissioned in 1942 to support the North American forces.

Copland's famous "Fanfare for the Common Man" came out of this same project, and Sunday's program made it seem fresh when it appeared as part of the last movement of the Symphony No. 3, which showed Mr. Botstein and the orchestra in top form. The Third Symphony was placed in a fascinating context next to Roger Sessions's Symphony No. 2, a dense and challenging work that engrosses with its Schoenbergian complexity but fails to tug on the primal emotions in the way that Cop-

## Aaron Copland and His World Bard Music Festival

land's symphony so effectively does.

But to the chagrin of many admirers, Copland soon headed off in Sessions's direction. Some of the most eye-opening parts of the weekend were the performances of Copland's 12-tone music from the 1950's and 60's, like the monumental Piano Fantasy, compellingly played on Saturday by Michael Boriskin, and the Piano Quartet, given an exciting reading on Sunday by Sharon Roffman, Marka Gustavsson, Sophie Shao and Simone Dinnerstein.

The big question loomed: What led a populist master like Copland to "abandon" his public and embrace this more difficult and abstract medium? Was Copland just trying to stay fashionable, to keep up with the younger generation?

Answers came obliquely. There may have been a political dimension to the choice, as music for a mass public became tainted by the Soviet example of state-mandated Socialist Realism. But on a personal artistic level, Copland's 12-tone shift can be compared with his 1920's embrace of jazz: both were styles that felt fresh to him at the time and helped him generate new compositional ideas. Copland saw the 12-tone music not as a radical departure but only as a different "angle of vision." And as demonstrated last weekend, he masterfully rigged the tone rows in his later music so that the pieces still bear his essential stamp, even without the tuneful simplicity.

The precise nature of that stamp was another pervasive theme. A panel of composers on Sunday morning brought acres of genial anecdotes, many turning on Copland's kindness and decency in his role as a self-proclaimed "spiritual papa" to a younger generation of composers.

The underlying emotional restraint in Copland's music was also discussed, and David Del Tredici suggested that this stylistic feature might be linked to the fact that Copland constantly hid the secret of his own homosexuality. Others pointed toward his Jewishness and his liberal political leanings as additional parts of an identity that he felt the need to play down to maintain his status as an all-American icon.

Simplicity, it seems, came dearly for Copland. And perhaps the more abstract his music became, the freer he felt to express its cost.