

# Williams College Symphonic Winds

Steven Dennis Bodner, *Music Director*

## *Program Notes*

*Aaron Copland occupies a special place in twentieth century American music; it is a part of the vernacular of American musical culture... How could this man, a Jew from Brooklyn, the son of immigrant parents from Russia, educated in Paris by Nadia Boulanger, speak a musical language immediately understood by all Americans? Perhaps it is the absolute directness of the music - the lack of ambiguity or pretension - that strikes us as so American. We are, after all, for better or for worse, a people who value such directness of expression - it is truly "a gift to be simple", even a virtue. In a century of ever-increasing musical complexities, Copland stood out: a clear voice, a voice for "the common man" in each of us.*

Hugh Wolff, conductor  
The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra

Aaron Copland is without equal in stature among American composers. His prodigious oeuvre, his many monographs (including *What to Listen for in Music*), his renown teaching abilities - all make Copland the "Dean of American composers". He revolutionized the role of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century composer; while many of his contemporaries were busy constructing an "Ivory Tower," he was creating a musical language that could directly and immediately communicate with the men and women of his own time. In commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth, we celebrate not only his life, but also his role in the development of American music. Besides the music of Aaron Copland, this program features the music of three other Pulitzer-Prize winning, 20<sup>th</sup>-century American composers: Morton Gould, William Schuman, and Charles Ives. Contemporaries of Aaron Copland, these three men, each in their own unique way, also helped to establish a uniquely American style.

As a note of interest, none of the works on this program were originally conceived for the wind band: *When Jesus Wept*, *Variations on a Shaker Melody* and *Red Pony* were each transcribed by the composer; *American Salute* was transcribed under the supervision of the composer; although not transcribed for *wind band* by the composer, *Down a Country Lane* was transcribed into the orchestral medium by the composer; and, in keeping with Ives's own predilection for free instrumentation (as demonstrated by the number of theatre orchestra works he penned), *Old Home Days* was arranged by Ives-scholar Jonathan Elkus.

### **Morton Gould (trans. Philip Lang): *American Salute***

Morton Gould was one of the most prolific composers of American history, publishing his first composition, *Just Six*, when he was only six years old. By eighteen, he was staff pianist at Radio City Music Hall, at twenty-one, the conductor of the WOR Mutual Radio. When Gould moved to CBS in the 1940s, his music reached an audience of millions. He composed in many genres; besides music for Broadway, films, and television, his symphonic works were being performed by the likes of Leopold Stowkowski and Arturo Toscanini. His creativity has been recognized in

numerous ways: a Pulitzer Prize (1995), a Kennedy Center Honors Award (1994), 12 Grammy nominations (and one Grammy award in 1966), to name but a few.

During World War II, Gould composed several settings of march tunes from the allied nations for performance on a March, 1943 United States Government Radio program. *American Salute*, a set of variations on *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* was written overnight, Gould beginning at dinner time and finishing it in time for the 9:00 a.m. broadcast the next day! Despite its relatively rapid genesis, *American Salute* has remained Gould's most popular and oft-performed work.

**William Schuman: *When Jesus Wept***

*When Jesus Wept* is originally the second movement of Schuman's *New England Triptych: Three Pieces after William Billings* written in 1956. As a result of various commissions, Schuman separately transcribed each movement for the wind band, *When Jesus Wept* finding its new form in 1959. The most significant alteration made by Schuman in the transcription process is reassignment of the solo voices; while the original orchestral version features an extended oboe and bassoon dialogue, the wind band version is instead scored for solo trumpet and euphonium. This instrumental change, coupled with the lone field drum of the introduction, create in this work a subtly martial, though mournful, atmosphere. The work is in a ternary form (a-b-a) with coda, with the book-ending sections containing the statements by the soloists. In the interior, though, Schuman faithfully presents the melodic material in its original form: as the round of William Billings (1746-1800), a Yankee tunesmith who was a prominent figure in early American music. The text set by Billings is as follows:

When Jesus wept, the falling Tear,  
In Mercy flow'd beyond all Bound;  
When Jesus groan'd a trembling Fear,  
Seiz'd all the guilty World around.

**Charles Ives (arr. Jonathan Elkus): *Old Home Days***

Jonathan Elkus provides the following notes on his arrangement of works by Charles Ives into the *Old Home Days Suite for Band*:

Charles E. Ives (1874-1954) was born in Danbury, Connecticut and died in New York City at the age of 79.

His father, George, was an accomplished cornet player and Civil War bandmaster, who conducted orchestras, bands, and choirs in Danbury and was his son's first and most influential music teacher. While he insisted on the mastery of traditional music practice, his imaginative teaching also inspired Charles's remarkable experiments with new kinds of musical sounds.

The songs and sketches assembled in this suite reflect Ives's lifelong love of familiar tunes and homegrown music making.

1. WALTZ begins and ends by quoting from Michael Nolan's popular Bowery waltz, "Little Annie Rooney." Ives's own verses to the song imagine Annie, now a bride, and her festive wedding party at "the old dance ground."

- 2a. THE OPERA HOUSE is the first part of the song "Memories," and the text, also by Ives, recalls a youngster's breathless expectancy as the pit band strikes up the overture.
- b. Just as the curtain rises, a drum roll-off takes our thoughts outdoors again to "march along down Main Street, behind the village band," amid the ringing of church and schoolhouse bells. OLD HOME DAY is the nostalgic title of the song from which this section is taken, and the obbligato line played during the repeat features bits and pieces of "The Girl I Left Behind Me," "Garryowen," and "Auld Land Syne."
3. The title of THE COLLECTION refers to a church offering. This setting of George Kingsley's hymn-tune *Tappan* introduces first "The Organist," then "The Soprano," and lastly a "Response by Village Choir."
4. SLOW MARCH, the earliest surviving song by Ives, was composed for the funeral of a family pet. Inscribed "to the Children's Faithful Friend," it opens and closes with a quotation from the "Dead March" of Handel's oratorio, *Saul*.
5. LONDON BRIDGE IS FALLEN DOWN! is a tonal and rhythmic "take-off" on the familiar tune, which we may imagine to be typical of young Ives's unruly keyboard improvisations. This arrangement is based on Kenneth Singleton's realization for brass quintet of Ives's sketches for organ or piano, which date from about 1891.

**Aaron Copland: *Variations on a Shaker Melody***

Aaron Copland won the Pulitzer Prize in music in 1945 for the orchestral suite from his ballet for *Appalachian Spring*. At the request of his publisher, Boosey & Hawkes, Copland extracted a set of variations from the suite and composed *Variations on a Shaker Melody* ("The Gift to Be Simple").

Generally considered the masterpiece of Copland's vernacular style, *Appalachian Spring* was commissioned in 1943 for Martha Graham by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, for performance at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. It was Graham's character, or at least Copland's perception of it that influenced the music. As Copland once remarked:

I was thinking primarily about Martha and her unique choreographic style, which I knew well. There's something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American. *Appalachian Spring* would never have existed without her special personality. The music reflects, I hope, the unique quality of a human being, an American landscape and a way of feeling.

**Aaron Copland (arr. Merlin Patterson): *Down a Country Lane***

In 1962 *Life* Magazine commissioned Aaron Copland to write a solo piano work for young students. In the spirit of such works as Bela Bartok's *Mikrokosmos* and Robert Schumann's *Album for the Young*, op. 68, Copland composed his *Down a Country Lane* for the June 29, 1962 issue of the magazine. Rare are the pieces such as these that are written by important composers that both demonstrate the ingenuity and unique compositional style of the composer *and* are aware of the technical and expressive limitations of the intended youthful performers. About the piece, Copland wrote, "the music is descriptive only in an imaginative sense, not a literal sense.

I didn't think up the title until the piece was finished -- *Down a Country Lane* just happened to fit its flowing quality." Predating Merlin Patterson's arrangement for wind band by 23 years, Copland himself crafted an arrangement for high school orchestra in 1965.

### **Aaron Copland: from *The Red Pony***

Aaron Copland wrote the music for the film *The Red Pony* in 1948, on the studio lot of Republic Pictures in the San Fernando Valley, California. The orchestral concert suite, completed during August of the same year, was prepared in response to a commission from Efrem Kurtz, who included it in his first program as conductor of the Houston Symphony Orchestra on October 30, 1948. In 1966, Copland transcribed four of the six movements from the orchestral suite (of which movements 2 and 4 will be heard this evening) into a composition for band.

Steinbeck's well-known tale is a series of vignettes concerning a ten-year old boy called Jody, and his life in a California ranch setting. There is a minimum of action of a dramatic or startling kind; rather, the story gets its warmth and sensitive quality from the character studies of the boy Jody, Jody's grandfather, the cow-hand Billy Buck, and Jody's parents, the Tiflins. As Copland remarked, the kind of emotions that Steinbeck evokes in *The Red Pony*, are essentially musical ones, as they deal so much with the unexpressed feelings of daily living.

WALK TO THE BUNKHOUSE is music from a scene depicting the interaction between Jody and Billy Buck. Billy Buck 'was a fine hand with horses', and Jody's admiration of him knew no bounds. A combination of aspects of the title music and a folk-like melody, suggesting the open-air quality of country living, HAPPY ENDING brings *The Red Pony* to a climactic finale.

### ***About the Conductor***

In addition to being in his first year as Music Director of the Williams College Symphonic Winds, **Steven Dennis Bodner** teaches an advanced undergraduate seminar in wind conducting at the University of Massachusetts and is the Music Director of the UMass Youth Wind Ensemble. For the past three years, he served as Assistant Conductor of both the Senior and Junior Massachusetts Youth Wind Ensembles, conducting them in performances throughout the United Kingdom, Austria, and the Czech Republic. He has recently guest conducted the Wind Ensembles of the University of Massachusetts, New England Conservatory, and Miami University, as well as the Harvard Group for New Music, the Cabot House Theatre and the UMass Chamber Winds. His performances have received praise from composers such as Pulitzer Prize winner Karel Husa. He holds Bachelor's degrees from Miami University (OH) in saxophone performance and philosophy, and a Master of Music degree with honors and distinction in performance from the New England Conservatory in wind ensemble conducting. Currently he is pursuing his Doctor of Philosophy degree in Music Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.