

# PRELUDE

MARCH 2024 • MASTERWORKS #6



HARTFORD  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

## Copland & Bernstein March 8 – 10, 2024

**"No artist is ahead of his time. He is his time; it is just that others are behind the times."**

**- Martha Graham**

Martha Graham is credited with the creation of modern dance. Her artistic legacy inspired both Copland and Bernstein to create music for dance, often composed in direct collaboration with choreographers. Graham drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources, from Greek mythology to modern art, and two of the composers featured this month drew their inspiration from the modern dance movement that she created.



Martha Graham

Dance is defined as creative movement, and we invariably speak of dance in terms of movement and choreography. But music is an equal and integral part of the total creation. Copland and Bernstein were both deeply committed to composing works for dance and

collaborated with various choreographers. Graham created more than 180 works over the span of 50 years, from solo performances to large-scale works, and she danced in most of those productions.<sup>i</sup>

One of three daughters, Graham was born May 11, 1894. Her father, a physician, eventually settled the family in Santa Barbara, California, when Graham was 15 years old.<sup>ii</sup> It is believed that she was profoundly influenced by her father, who used physical movement to remedy nervous disorders.<sup>iii</sup> At the age of 17, after attending a performance by Ruth St. Denis at the Mason Opera House in Los Angeles, Graham implored her parents to allow her to study dance.<sup>iv</sup> Her parents would not permit it, but upon her father's death, Graham enrolled as a student in the newly formed Denishawn,<sup>v</sup> a Los Angeles dance school founded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, the founders of Jacob's Pillow, the renowned home of dance in the Berkshires.<sup>vi</sup> Graham

spent more than eight years at Denishawn, as student, instructor, and performer. Shawn choreographed the dance production *Xochitl* specifically for Graham, who performed the role of an attacked Aztec maiden to critical acclaim.<sup>vii</sup> After leaving Denishawn in 1923, Graham briefly performed with the Greenwich Village Follies and then took a teaching position at the Eastman School of Music and Theater in Rochester, NY.<sup>viii</sup> By 1926, she had established the Martha Graham Dance Company in a tiny studio in midtown Manhattan, where she began trailblazing experiments in dance.<sup>ix</sup> She incorporated jarring, violent, spastic and trembling movements, in the belief that such physical expressions gave an outlet to emotional undercurrents largely ignored in other Western dance forms.<sup>x</sup> While many early critics described her dances as "ugly,"<sup>xi</sup> her genius caught on, and the dance world has been forever altered by her vision.



Martha Graham

Graham conceived each new work in its entirety, collaborating with artists such as Japanese American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, with whom she developed stage innovations that used sculpture and three-dimensional set pieces, instead of traditional flats and

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drops.<sup>xii</sup> She collaborated with actor/director John Houseman, as well as fashion designers Halston, Donna Karan and Calvin Klein.<sup>xiii</sup> She worked with well-known composers including Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti, to name a few.<sup>xiv</sup> Her company was the training ground for many future modern choreographers, such as Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp, and she created roles for classical ballet superstars such as Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov.<sup>xv</sup>



Martha Graham

In 1976, Graham received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford, who declared her a “national treasure.”<sup>xvi</sup> She was the first dancer and choreographer to receive such an honor and, in 1985, President Ronald Reagan designated her among the

first recipients of the United States National Medal of Arts.<sup>xvii</sup>

Graham continued to dance into her mid-70s and choreographed until her death on April 1, 1991, at the age of 96, leaving a legacy of inspiration for countless dancers and artists.<sup>xviii</sup>

Composer Aaron Copland, born November 14, 1900, believed that classical music could eventually be as popular as jazz in America.<sup>xix</sup> His firm commitment to this goal was reflected in the music he composed, as he moved away



Aaron Copland

from the traditional European sound.<sup>xx</sup> Copland, as founder of the Yaddo Festival of American Music in 1932, became a leader in the expanding community of 20<sup>th</sup> century American classical musicians, who were searching for a distinctively American sound.<sup>xxi</sup> Copland believed he could find a way to popularize symphonic music through his compositions.<sup>xxii</sup>

Copland’s search for the widest possible audience

led him to compose for dance and films.<sup>xxiii</sup> His film scores for *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and *Our Town* (1940) were exceedingly popular and well-received, and his score for *The Heiress* (1949) won him the Academy Award.<sup>xxiv</sup> Perhaps his most notable contributions to the expansion of symphonic audiences were his collaborations with choreographers Agnes DeMille on *Rodeo* (1942), and Martha Graham in the creation of *Appalachian Spring* (1944), for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in Music. Both ballets presented varied views of American life, from the American West to Shaker themes and traditions.<sup>xxv</sup>

Copland’s fellow composer and close friend, Leonard Bernstein, also championed American artists and composers.



Copland and Bernstein

Bernstein’s compositions for dance began with his early collaboration with choreographer Jerome Robbins on his score for *Fancy Free*, a ballet. That ballet, and Bernstein’s first musical, *On the Town*, both premiered in 1944, just one year after Bernstein, a 25-year-old assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, stepped in to conduct the orchestra in a national broadcast from Carnegie Hall, in place of an ailing Bruno Walter, on just a few hours’ notice and no rehearsal.<sup>xxvi</sup> The next day, his sensational performance occupied the front pages of the *New York Times*, and Bernstein became an overnight celebrity.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Bernstein’s daughter, Jamie Bernstein, has made a point of underscoring how much her father loved people. In writings and interviews, she has explained her father’s dual role as both composer and conductor, and revealed why some of Bernstein’s greatest compositions were for dance or theater:

“A composer is solitary and contemplative and turned inward. They have to work all by themselves, which was not a thing my father liked to do. He hated being all alone.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

Given Bernstein’s disinterest in the solitary lifestyle

of a composer, his attraction to work forms that required extensive collaboration with dancers and other artists makes sense.

After *Fancy Free*, which was incorporated into the 1944 musical *On the Town*, and memorialized in the 1949 film version starring Gene Kelly, Bernstein continued to write for dance and theater.<sup>xxxix</sup> With Jerome Robbins, he created *Facsimile* for the American Ballet Theater in 1946 and *Dybbuk* for the New York City Ballet in 1975.<sup>xxx</sup> In 1950, Bernstein scored the music and lyrics for a Broadway version of *Peter Pan*.<sup>xxxi</sup> His 1953 undertaking, *Wonderful Town*, an adaptation of the play *Sister Eileen*, was his second collaboration with lyricists Betty Comden and Adolph Green, who wrote the books and lyrics for *On the Town*.<sup>xxxii</sup> The musical *Candide* hit Broadway in 1956, and in 1957 his collaboration with Jerome Robbins and lyricist Stephen Sondheim gave the world *West Side Story*.<sup>xxxiii</sup> One of Bernstein's rarely performed works is *MASS: a Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers*, a remarkable collaboration with renowned choreographer Alvin Ailey, which debuted at the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC in 1971.<sup>xxxiv</sup> His last Broadway show was a 1976 collaboration with Alan Jay Lerner (lyricist for *My Fair Lady* and others), who wrote the book and lyrics for *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, which unfortunately was not a hit, and ran for only 7 performances.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Graham, Copland, and Bernstein all created and championed art forms that were uniquely American. When Copland passed away in 1999, the title of his obituary in the *New York Times* read, "Aaron Copland: Champion of the American Sound."<sup>xxxvi</sup> Similarly, Bernstein will be remembered as a tireless champion of American music.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The two composers shared a close friendship that continued throughout their lives, and during his career, Bernstein recorded nearly all of Copland's orchestral works and devoted several of his televised *Young People's Concerts* to Copland.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Each of these three remarkable American artists have something else in common. They passionately

believed in the power of the arts to heal and motivate humanity to find peaceful solutions. Martha Graham used dance to express shared human emotions and experiences, and not merely provide decorative displays of graceful movement. She explained her views of dance to the world: "My dancing is not an attempt to interpret life in the literary sense. It is an affirmation of life through movement."<sup>xxxix</sup> Copland famously said, "So long as the human spirit thrives on this planet, music in some living form will accompany and sustain it and give it expressive meaning."<sup>xl</sup>

Jamie Bernstein best summarized what these three artists shared, in observing her father's passionate belief in the healing power of art:

"My father clung hard to the belief that by creating beauty, and by sharing it with as many people as possible, artists had the power to tip the earthly balance in favor of brotherhood and peace. After all, he reasoned, if humans could create and appreciate musical harmony, then surely, they were capable of replicating the very same harmony in the world they lived in."<sup>xli</sup>



Martha Graham

## JOIN US!

**Please join the HSO** on March 8 – 10, 2024, to hear Copland's *Appalachian Spring* with historical footage of Martha Graham's performance of the piece, Bernstein's *Fancy Free*, and *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* by Strauss Jr.

## Are you interested in learning more about our featured artists? Please click on the links for some delightful treats!

Have fun watching the 1973 performance of *Rodeo*, choreographed by Agnes DeMille for the American Ballet Theatre:

[\*\*Rodeo American Ballet Theatre 1973 - YouTube\*\*](#)

Enjoy a different performance of *Rodeo* by the west coast company, Ballet West:

[\*\*Ballet West Presents Angas de Mille's Rodeo \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

To learn more about Martha Graham, enjoy this documentary:

[\*\*Martha Graham Documentary NHD 2016 \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

We dare you to TRY to sit still as you watch Bernstein conduct his own composition, *Symphonic Dances* from *West Side Story*:

[\*\*Bernstein : Symphonic Dances from West Side Story \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

And for a real thrill, enjoy multiple clips of Bernstein in rehearsal conducting Jose Carreras, Kiri Takanawa and Tatiana Troyanos in a full performance of *West Side Story*:

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(1a\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(2\) - YouTube\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein West Side Story studio-takes \(2a\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(3\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(4\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein West Side Story studio-takes \(4a\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein conducts Cha Cha in West side Story \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(5\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein West Side Story studio-takes \(5a\) - YouTube\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(7\) - YouTube\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein West Side Story studio-takes \(7a\) - YouTube\*\*](#)

[\*\*Leonard Bernstein: West Side Story, studio-takes. \(8\) \(youtube.com\)\*\*](#)



## WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Watch an original performance of *Fancy Free*:

[\*\*Fancy Free - YouTube\*\*](#)

Enjoy rare footage of Copland conducting *Appalachian Spring*:

[\*\*Copland Conducts Appalachian Spring - YouTube\*\*](#)

Delight in watching Ricardo Muti conduct the Vienna Philharmonic in a 2021 New Year's Eve performance of *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*:

[\*\*The Beautiful Blue Danube | From Vienna: The New Year's Celebration 2021 | Great Performances on PBS - YouTube\*\*](#)

# CASEY'S CLASSICS

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 in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

*On the Beautiful Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss, Jr., has too many great recordings to choose just one, but a personal favorite is the recording featuring Fritz Reiner conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (RCA).

One of Aaron Copland's most famous works, *Appalachian Spring*, has special genius as conducted by Copland's life-long friend, Leonard Bernstein, with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (SONY).

Speaking of Bernstein, his tuneful and frolicsome ballet, *Fancy Free*, is, of course, definitively performed by the composer conducting the New York Philharmonic (SONY).



Graham, Copland and Bernstein

**Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to [dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org). We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!**

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