



THAMES YOUTH ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTOR
SIMON FERRIS

CONCERT

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 8TH 2007
7.30PM

CADOGAN HALL
5 SLOANE TERRACE LONDON SW1X 9DQ



PROGRAMME

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) – Overture to “Candide”

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) – Appalachian Spring

interval (20 minutes)

Roy Harris (1898-1979) – Third Symphony

George Gershwin (1898-1937) – An American in Paris

Leonard Bernstein – Overture to “Candide” (1956)

Bernstein’s setting of Lillian Hellman’s libretto for *Candide* (1956) followed his successful Broadway hits of *On the Town* (1944) and *Wonderful Town* (1950), but its more sophisticated, operetta-like treatment did not prove a great draw and the show closed after a short run of 73 performances. The operetta has since undergone a number of revivals but the overture, since its inception, has never lost popularity as a concert piece.

An exuberant blend of Broadway pizzazz and musical artfulness, it interlaces two key arias from the show. The first, alternating bars of three and four beats, is a duet between Candide and Cunegonde as they anticipate the (very different) visions they have of the happiness attending them in wedlock. The second, where Cunegonde, estranged from Candide, laments her fate as a kept woman in Paris (“Glitter and be gay”) is a typical bel-canto-style double aria, in which, after the slower section where she laments the immorality of her current state (interleaved, in the first instance, with the duet) she begins to adorn herself with jewels and her mood starts to pick up – as does the tempo, the orchestra putting together a close fitting and accelerating canon worthy (and very reminiscent of) Rossini.

Aaron Copland – Appalachian Spring (1945)

The ballet *Appalachian Spring* (1943-44) was a collaboration between Copland and the choreographer Martha Graham, who provided both a synopsis and a title (taken from a poem by Hart Crane) for the work, and

the suggestion that a song-like theme and variations might be appropriate in the context of the ballet. She also, for good measure, took the part of the bride in the first performance in 1944 at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Copland's working title had in fact been *Ballet for Martha*, and this was retained as the subtitle of the work. Martha Graham was a Pennsylvania Quaker, whom Copland described as "rather prim and restrained, simple yet strong, and" he went on "one thinks of these qualities as being especially American. Thus, the character of my score, which only quotes one actual hymn tune, *Simple Gifts*, uses rhythms, harmonies, and melodies that suggest an American ambience."

If he seemed unconcerned about details of title or scenario (the original scenario to which he wrote the ballet was changed by Graham for the first performance, to Copland's genial indifference), it was probably because it was this "American ambience" which really interested him.

The son of first generation Lithuanian-Jewish immigrants, Copland grew up in Brooklyn over his father's successful department store, the youngest of five children, and he cited his earliest musical influences as ragtime and opera, to which twin poles he was guided by his elder sister, Laurine. After graduating from high school he spent some years studying composition with Nadia Boulanger in Paris (1921-24), and subsequently acquired a reputation for uncompromising, somewhat severe or strident music, often shot through with jazz idioms.

It was, in part, his developing contact with socialism – in which he had taken an early interest, an interest sharpened during the depression years with trips made to (revolutionary) Mexico – which drove him to adopt more accessible forms of expression. His interest in folk idiom was not new either – he had used folk and hymn tunes freely in his earlier ballets, *Billy the Kid* (1938) and *Rodeo* (1942) – nor his acute feel for nationalisms generally – he believed from an early age that music must in some sense be rooted in the culture from which it sprang, and in which it found its first and most important audience – he talked of this, in fact, as a "deep psychological need", and noted, further, the importance of "affirming" a relation between music and the wider world.

The old Shaker tune, "Simple gifts" (first published in the Abrahams collection *'Tis the gift to be simple* in 1848) is not only the core but the telos of the whole work. From it are derived the opening triadic melody and many of the subsequent melodic devices, such that the arrival of the melody

in the last quarter of the suite is felt as a homecoming rather than a culmination. The diatonic directness of the melodic writing, moreover, gave Copland considerable licence with the harmonic underpinning and rhythmic development of his melodic line, allowing him to exercise his musical wit and inventiveness while never losing sight of his goals of directness and clarity.

The ballet was originally scored for thirteen instruments (the most that could be accommodated in the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress); the following year he produced the full orchestral version of the suite, in which he managed to retain the chamber-like sonorities which he had always admired in Mahler (and which Stravinsky admired in him). The suite comprises eight interconnected movements to the full ballet's fourteen, which Copland described as follows:

1. *Very slowly. Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light.*
2. *Fast. Sudden burst of unison strings in A major arpeggios starts the action. A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene.*
3. *Moderate. Duo for the Bride and her Intended – scene of tenderness and passion.*
4. *Quite fast. The Revivalist and his flock. Folksy feeling – suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.*
5. *Still faster. Solo dance of the Bride – presentiment of motherhood. Extremes of joy and fear and wonder.*
6. *Very slowly (as at first). Transition scene to music reminiscent of the introduction.*
7. *Calm and flowing. Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme.*

Moderate. Coda. The Bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house. Muted strings intone a hushed prayer-like chorale passage. The close is reminiscent of the opening music.



interval (20 minutes)

Roy [LeRoy] Ellsworth Harris – Third Symphony, in one movement (1939)

Roy Harris was, in many ways, an unlikely composer of symphonies. He was born and grew up in a farming family who worked land in the Oklahoma panhandle and later in California. He had studied piano, initially with his mother, and between 1917 and 1921 was at UCLA and Berkeley, where he supported himself by driving dairy and delivery vans. In 1926, having started to cut his teeth as a composer, he travelled to the East Coast where he met Copland, upon whose recommendation he studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, returning to the USA in 1929.

While he was fond of contrasting the ordinariness of his upbringing with that of his East Coast colleagues, his approach to composition had nothing of the homespun about it. He was concerned to develop an American approach in his music, but he did so resolutely through the means of European art music, citing renaissance polyphony, plainchant, and the music of Bach and Beethoven as his influences.

That he was able to distil from these not only a very American but also a very Western American concoction was due indirectly to the way his compositional technique was developing during the 1930s. Briefly, this technique rested on two pillars: the first, a process of autogenesis (characteristic, also, of the music of Sibelius), one idea or passage providing the seed for next, and the second a carefully articulated theory of triadic relationships based on the overtone series whereby, rather than providing a harmonic argument, he develops a series of (frequently fractured) harmonic contexts, somewhat analogous to the overlaid visual planes and competing perspectives of cubist art.

It is these spare textures and harmonies, and the slowly evolving musical line which have been seen as characteristic of Western landscapes, and which Harris himself saw as representing in some way the “qualities of heroic strength”, and “the fierce driving power – optimistic, young, rough and ready” of the people among whom he had grown up.

Characteristically he provided exegetic notes to the Third Symphony, articulating its five part structure for the listener, as follows:

I. Tragic - low string sonorities

II. Lyric - strings, horns, woodwinds

III. Pastoral - woodwinds with a polytonal string background

IV. Fugue - dramatic

A. Brass and percussion dominating

B. Canonic development of materials from Section II constituting background for further development of Fugue

V. Dramatic - tragic

A. Restatement of violin theme of Section I: tutti strings in canon with tutti woodwinds against brass and percussion developing rhythmic motif from climax of Section IV

B. Coda - development of materials from Section I and II over pedal timpani

The long-breathed monodic melody of the symphony's opening, reminiscent perhaps of plainchant or protestant hymnody, is gradually filled out by competing harmonic accompaniments - the first entry of the violins, for example, is in the key of C minor, cutting across the predominant G major of the opening - and the initially idyllic mood is rapidly unsettled.

The second section [**lyric**] allows a contrapuntally treated melody in the woodwind to metamorphose into an accompanying figure for a new theme in the strings. This tendency to treat the different sections of the orchestra as distinct choirs is also clearly in evidence in the third [**pastoral**] section, where divided strings play arpeggiated figures against the delicately varied, interrelated but never identical solo woodwind and brass melodies.

The fourth section, which Harris describes as a fugue, is really a tight canon, mainly in the brass, over a rhythmic strings accompaniment, where no particularly dense contrapuntal texture develops, but in which, instead, the dramatic tension is consistently ratcheted up. This leads into the final section where brass chords, developed from the fugue, punctuate what gradually emerges as the return of opening theme.

The final section reintroduces the melodic lyricism of the first sections, but over an uneasy drumbeat, and the symphony draws to a close in a chilly G minor.

That this symphony should have been recognized on its premiere in 1939 as not only a masterpiece, but a specifically American masterpiece, was testament, perhaps, to a dark (and darkening) decade. By temperament a saturnine and occasionally violent man who, it has been speculated,

suffered from bipolar disorder, Harris had bitter first hand experience of the Depression and, like Copland, was drawn to Marxism, making several trips to the Soviet Union. And yet these seemingly divergent streams found focus in a vision of, and faith in, American working people, which in turn found expression through a long-looked-for but ultimately inadvertent American idiom.

George Gershwin – An American in Paris (1928)

Gershwin visited Paris in the spring and summer of 1928 as part of a sort of Grand Tour, during which, already a rich and respected composer in his own right, he was entertained by Milhaud, Poulenc, Prokofiev, Stravinsky and Ravel in Paris, and by Franz Lehár in Vienna.

While his success was conspicuous, both in the realms of show music, and, by now, more extended concert pieces – *Rhapsody in Blue* had premiered in 1924, and the *Concerto in F* the following year – Gershwin was consistently seeking to broaden his intellectual and musical horizons. He had started collecting art – notably pieces by Picasso and Chagall – in 1926, and shortly thereafter developed a hobby in drawing and painting to the point where it absorbed at least half of his time; and while in Paris he solicited lessons in composition, unsuccessfully, from both Stravinsky and Ravel. (He did, subsequently, manage to secure some lessons from Schoenberg, with whom he played tennis in Hollywood, and who, comparing their respective incomes, wondered whether the lessons should not be going in the other direction).

Gershwin's need to be respected can in part be traced to his own genuinely modest sense of the patchwork nature of his musical gifts. He had grown up in an unmusical family in lower East Side New York, and had not taken music lessons of any sort until he was 11 or 12; his natural gifts of melody had led to early success as a songwriter, but when he was commissioned by Paul Whiteman to write an extended jazz composition (*Rhapsody in Blue*) his shortage of technical experience began to tell, and the orchestration was provided by Ferde Grofé, Whiteman's pianist and chief arranger.

By *An American in Paris*, however, some of those shortcomings had been addressed, and the title page proudly states that he was both composer and orchestrator. The piece is divided, more or less equally, in two, with a brief coda, the two extended sections being self-contained both tonally (F major and B flat major) and thematically, and corresponding to the impressions of, in Gershwin's words, "an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about

the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere” and “a spasm of homesickness” on the part of that visitor, perhaps after a couple of drinks. The first section is more thematically dense – five separate themes are presented in succession, with the re-iterated ambulatory first theme providing a loosely organising principle, and the visitor’s impressions of Paris street life are given a concrete correlative in the shape of tuned taxi horns which Gershwin himself brought back from Paris. In the second, American, section a characteristically pared-down bluesy tune is contrasted only with a more upbeat Charleston, before returning with the first (Paris) theme in the brief coda.

The piece – Gershwin’s first without piano – was premiered with the New York Philharmonic at the Carnegie Hall in November 1928 under the baton of Walter Damrosch and in a programme which included music by Wagner and Franck. In one sense, this eager auto-didact had succeeded in muscling his way very visibly into not only America’s but Europe’s musical world; in another he had managed, by accident or design, to set himself apart as the composer of one of the most memorable pieces of musical Americana of the 20th century.

programme notes © John Ferris, 2007



Simon Ferris, conductor

Simon Ferris read music and was organ scholar at King's College London. As an undergraduate he pursued additional instrumental and musicianship studies with Bernard Oram at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and, after graduation, received composition tuition and encouragement from Geoffrey Bush.

A skilled and experienced jazz musician, Simon’s wide-ranging professional career now embraces an array of genres and disciplines, finding at its core a mixture of performing, composing, arranging, writing, conducting and teaching.

Simon is currently Composer in Residence at Tiffin School, and Musician in Residence at Tiffin Girls' School, Kingston upon Thames.

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For further information, please contact Rebecca Lacey, chair of TYO:

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Section coaches

Joanna Korzinek, strings

Pippa Hyde, strings

Ian Stott, brass

Paul Price, woodwind

First Violins

So Yeon Kim*

Rebecca Minio-Paluello

James Carter

Max Liefkes

Rachel Bruce

Georgina Jackman

Eli Lee

Jessica Eccleston

Second Violins

Eun-Young Kim*

David Mogilner

Pradeep Kannan

Jonathan Wong

Cheryl Pilbeam

Celia Rogers

Imogen Dodds

Nicholas Lung

Sian Davies

Amy Sibley

Anna Selig

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Violas

Ric Hollingbery*

Tillie Dilworth

Eleanor Figueiredo

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Cellos

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Horns

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Trumpets

Max Fagandini*

Matthew Parker

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Trombones

Hatty Martin*

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Piano/Celesta

Olivia Walker

*principal

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