

Gershwin's **AN AMERICAN IN PARIS** is both a musical portrait of and a tribute to a city that in the *Roaring Twenties* was *the* place to be, a cultural Mecca for artists from all over the world.

It seems fitting to call *Aaron Copland's* visit to Czechoslovakia **AN AMERICAN IN PRAGUE**, although the setting and symbolism could hardly be more contrasted. When *Copland* came to Czechoslovakia in 1973, five years after the Soviet-led invasion, the country was firmly in the grip of an oppressive and retrograde regime. Prague, far from being a buoyant and bustling place, was rather grim and grey, with *culture* and the *arts* under a complete siege. Anything coming from the West, especially from the US, was treated as suspicious and a risk and threat. There was strict censorship everywhere. Radio, TV, books, films, plays, records, concerts, exhibitions, etc. - everything had to have Communist Party approval, and was all carefully screened, considered, selected, censored and edited.

Twenty years on, it seems a miracle that a famous Jewish American was then allowed to conduct 20th Century American classical music in Prague. **Czech Radio** even recorded the event and left us this wonderful legacy: the *Czech Philharmonic Orchestra* playing in top form under the baton of a leading American musical figure of this century at the pinnacle of his career. Considering the technology in the 1970's, it is all captured in glorious sound, aided by the unique acoustics of the Dvořák Hall (Rudolfinum).

The repertoire combines 20th Century classics such as *Ives's* **THE UNANSWERED QUESTION**, *Bernstein's* **CANDIDE** Overture and *Copland's* **BILLY THE KID**, with such rarely played or recorded works as *Martinů's* **HALF-TIME**, *Schuman's* **NEW ENGLAND TRIPTYCH**, *Stravinsky's* **ODE** and *Copland's* own **INSCAPE**.

All in all, what an incredible and magnificent oversight by the Czech Censor's department! But *Copland's* presence in Prague must have been helped by the fact that during his successful career as a conductor that began in the 1940's in Latin America, he conducted over a hundred symphonic orchestras around the world and probably passed the 'acceptability test' by having conducted in the Soviet Union in 1960!

Aaron Copland could not have wished for a better 'partner' in Czechoslovakia: amongst several high quality symphonic outfits, the **Czech Philharmonic Orchestra** was - and still is - considered one of the best in the world. Its first concert was conducted by *Antonín Dvořák* on the 4th January 1896. Four of its principal conductors have since raised and maintained the highest interpretative standards combined with a unique orchestral sound: *Václav Talich*, *Rafael Kubelík*, *Karel Ančerl* and *Václav Neumann*. Many of the world's finest conductors worked with the orchestra during the famous *Prague Spring International Music Festival* or during its regular 'seasonal cycles' (autumn and spring series of concerts) as *Copland* did in October '73.

Aaron Copland (1900-90) had a considerable impact on the 20th Century American music. Called *the Dean of American music*, he was not only an exceptional composer and outstanding conductor, but also an influential teacher, writer, broadcaster, pianist, organizer, etc. He was also the holder and recipient of some of the most important posts and awards in the music industry.

Born in Brooklyn to a family of Russian Jewish immigrants, he had his initial music lessons with *Rubin Goldmark* and then continued his studies in Paris with *Nadia Boulanger*. She later played the organ in his first major work, SYMPHONY FOR ORGAN AND ORCHESTRA (1926). His career as a composer soon took off with a number of jazz influenced works, followed by major contributions to the ballet, symphonic and film repertoires. *Copland* aimed at writing **American** music and reaching large audiences. Accessibility certainly ranked high in his mind and he quite remarkably combined the *popular* with the *serious* in many of his masterpieces - APPALACHIAN SPRING, BILLY THE KID, LINCOLN PORTRAIT, RODEO, EL SALÓN MÉXICO, THIRD SYMPHONY, etc. His intelligence and imagination combined with his compositional and orchestration skills worked magically. He was innovative without necessarily being shocking. He did not shy from being conventional, lyrical, likable, whilst at the same time experimenting with timbres, complex rhythms, harsh dissonances, etc. In his versatility, *Copland* always retained individuality, integrity and dignity.

In the 50's, *Copland* began to turn to serial music, with which he had briefly experimented in the 1920's. **INSCAPE**, one of his last compositions, is a fascinating example of his dodecaphonic writing. Built around two 12-tone rows, INSCAPE in fact sounds quite tonal and pleasing, a far cry from the austerity and cold intellectualism that one tends to associate with serialism and its quite rigid, mathematical rules. Whilst *Copland* could ingeniously expand on simple folk songs and intricately weave them into his scores, here he can just as skillfully mask the strict nature of his algebraic material.

The title itself, borrowed from the 19th century English poet *G. M. Hopkins*, refers to *Copland's* fascination with '*quasi-mystical illumination*' that lies behind the creative process. *Copland* talks about '*exteriorising inner feelings*' when exploring his own '*inscape*'. It is up to a listener to '*relive in his own mind the completed revelation of the composer's thought*'.

INSCAPE was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic for its 125th anniversary. *Leonard Bernstein* premiered it on October 20, 1967.

The mysticism of creation and of the universe as a whole was a frequent subject in the life and works of another maverick American composer, **Charles Ives**. It therefore comes as no surprise that throughout his typically esoteric, enigmatic and avant-garde piece from 1908, *Ives* can only pose **THE UNANSWERED QUESTION**.

Charles Ives (1874-1954) must be considered one of the most extraordinary innovators and visionaries in the 20th century music. *Stravinsky*, fascinated by *Ives*'s originality and inventiveness, at the same time warned of 'the danger to think of *Ives* as a mere historical phenomenon, "The Great Anticipator",' and forgetting about the *music* he actually wrote. The risk is obvious, as volumes can be written on *Ives*'s initiation of *aleatory*, *ametrical* and *asymmetrical rhythms*, *atonality*, *clusters*, *collage*, *dissonances*, *jazz*, *free (dissonant) counterpoint*, *multiple metrics*, *polychordal textures*, *polyrhythms*, *polytonality*, *quarter tones*, *ragtime*, *spatial music*, *stereophony*, etc. Given that *Ives* tried just about everything well before any one else did, it would not be surprising to discover other novelties one day. Meanwhile, THE UNANSWERED QUESTION demonstrates how beautifully his advanced techniques can work.

This short and deceptively simple work contains 3 different instrumental layers, each with a life of its own, in juxtaposition with one another. Two conductors are usually required (not an uncommon occurrence in *Ives*'s music). *Ives* had an unconventional musical upbringing which moulded his compositional thinking. He liked to sing and his father often accompanied him on piano, except that he played in a different key! To stretch Charles's ears even further, he played *two* melodies in *two* different keys simultaneously. No wonder that *Ives* enjoyed superimposing several apparently independent orchestral groups!

Here the strings (which can be optionally placed off-stage), play very quietly and slowly a melancholic, purely diatonic harmonic progression. Their distant, consonant and motionless sound represents 'the Silences of the Druids - Who Know, See and Hear Nothing.' The solo trumpet poses seven times the 'Perennial Question of Existence' in a repetitive atonal two-bar figure. A quartet of flutes, 'The Fighting Answerers', try to answer the first 6 questions, each time longer, louder, more dissonant, frenzied and confused, finally leaving the last one unanswered. This haunting piece ends in uncertainty, in contrast to *Ives*'s 'other career' - he was very successful in the insurance business, which he saw as 'a means for people to gain control over their own lives by providing for unfavorable eventualities'. We can only regret that he composed solely during week-ends and holidays...

Some of the characterizations of *Ives* would apply equally well to **Igor Stravinsky** (1882-1971). Also a maverick figure, an individualist, an innovator, very much his own man setting up trends, and hardly a follower of fashion. But among some notable differences, *Ives* remained almost totally dissociated with the music he wrote - he never went to concerts, never listened to the radio, never accepted royalties, etc. *Stravinsky* not only conducted his own works, but meticulously noted every detail that might effect their performance. This did not prevent the ODE from nearly being a disaster when introduced by *Koussevitzky* and the Boston SO in 1943.

The **ODE**, an elegiacal chant in 3 parts, is one of *Stravinsky's* most accessible, peaceful and relatively uncomplicated works. Throughout its first performance though, the trumpet player misread his B flat trumpet part as if it were for a C trumpet. Even worse, the two halves of the last page were erroneously copied together into a single part '*and my simple triadic piece concluded in a cacophony that would now win me new esteem at Darmstadt*', recalled *Stravinsky*.

The ODE was written in *Stravinsky's* early Hollywood years. In fact ECLOGUE, its middle part, was originally intended for the film JANE EYRE, but later abandoned. *Stravinsky* was by no means comfortably off, and yet lucrative offers from Hollywood did not lure him - not even when he was promised \$100,000 just to lend his name to music that would be written by someone else.

The ODE was commissioned by *Koussevitzky* and is dedicated to the memory of his wife, *Natalie*. Whilst nostalgia and melancholy prevail in the opening EULOGY and the closing EPITAPH, the lively ECLOGUE is a tribute to **Tanglewood**, the unique American Music Center founded in 1937 by *Koussevitzky*. Tanglewood, with its yearly festival, a school for composers, performers and conductors with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in residence, is of unparalleled importance for the shaping of American music. *Copland* headed the composition department for many years and his choice of *Stravinsky's* ODE for this concert is inspired and rewarding, if still unconventional.

Copland's **BILLY THE KID** was commissioned by *Lincoln Kirstein*, a major American dance impresario and the director of BALLET CARAVAN. *Kirstein* aimed at moving ballet away from the Russian tradition and he wanted everything about BILLY THE KID to be truly *American*. The ballet follows the life of the notorious cowboy and *Copland* was to accompany it in an adequate musical language. Quoting American folk tunes, Negro spirituals and the like were favourite means of American composers in striving to achieve an American musical identity. *Copland* successfully tried using national elements before in EL SALÓN MÉXICO (1936). Here he was given collections of cowboy tunes and '*it was not long before I found myself hopelessly involved with GIT ALONG LITTLE DOGIES, GREAT GRAND-DAD, THE OLD CHISHOLM TRAIL, GOODBYE, OLD PAINT and THE DYING COWBOY.*' '*It is a delicate operation to put fresh and unconventional harmonies to well-known melodies without spoiling their naturalness; moreover, for an orchestral score, one must expand, contract, rearrange, and superimpose the bare tunes themselves, giving them something of one's own touch.*'

Copland was uniquely successful in his task. His music is functional and perfect for the ballet, capturing vividly and colourfully all the various moods and situations, with typically *Coplandesque* orchestration, his use of dissonances, polyrhythms, irregular metres, jazz elements - and cowboy tunes, intrinsically incorporated in.

Martinů's HALF-TIME is the only non-American work in the concert. *Bohuslav Martinů* (1890-1959) nonetheless lived in the US and he taught at Tanglewood with *Copland* in the 1940's.

HALF-TIME made history a lot earlier, in 1924, as the first musical portrait of a sporting event. It preceded *Honegger's* RUGBY by five years and it ranks alongside his famous PACIFIC 231, *Shostakovich's* BOLT, *Carpenter's* SKYSCRAPERS, *Prokofiev's* LE PAS D'ACIER, *Mosolov's* FOUNDRY or *Antheil's* BALLET MÉCANIQUE as one of the musical monuments to the new sensations and accomplishments of the *modern age*. The reaction to the sentimentalism of Romantic music, which in so many ways seemed to have reached a dead-end at the turn of the century, led to various efforts to create *new music*. The terms *futurism*, *bruitism* or *machine music* cover the tendencies to depict new technology and to reflect the gathering pace of 20th century civilization. HALF-TIME does not exactly fall into any of the *-isms*, but it shocked its audiences and marked a turning point in *Martinů's* career. The sudden new musical language, fast, aggressive, as if driven by a motoric force, the enforcing of the rhythmical emphasis, the striking chords and harsh ostinati - this was *Martinů* after a year in Paris, reacting here above all to *Igor Stravinsky*.

Martinů's music still awaits its proper appraisal and HALF-TIME, albeit an occasional piece written in 10 days, carries all the marks of *Martinů's* invention, originality and musical richness.

Schuman's NEW ENGLAND TRIPTYCH is another successful piece of *Americana*. And yet, when listing characteristics which typically praise *Schuman's* music for its *energetic drive, propulsive vigour, emotional vitality, complexity, virtuosity, boldness, masterful handling of instrumental colour, rhythmic ingenuity, warmth, intensity, lyric beauty* - one could easily be describing *Martinů*. Both are very distinct artists and it is their national identity which manifests itself often so strongly in the music - *Martinů's Slavonic* character is a far cry from *Schuman's Americanism*.

William Howard Schuman (1910-1992) is one of America's foremost symphonic writers. Initially an informal student of *Copland*, their careers later often interlaced when both composers held important administrative posts - with *Schuman* becoming the president of the Juilliard School and then of the Lincoln Center in New York.

The NEW ENGLAND TRIPTYCH is subtitled **Three Pieces for orchestra after William Billings**. *Billings*, an American 18th century composer of psalms and hymns, had a strong following in his native New England. His hymn CHESTER compares to the MARSEILLAISE in its importance for the American revolution and *Schuman* based the last part of his NEW ENGLAND TRIPTYCH on it. The first part utilizes BE GLAD THEN, AMERICA and the second part develops WHEN JESUS WEPT. Written in 1956, the NEW ENGLAND TRIPTYCH was commissioned by *André Kostelanetz*.

The CD ends with a rousing performance of *Bernstein's* **CANDIDE** overture. *Copland* and **Leonard Bernstein** (1918-90) were close friends and were markedly similar in many respects.

Both were immensely multi-talented - composers, conductors, pianists, teachers, lecturers, authors, broadcasters and organizers. Both came from a similar background - *Bernstein* was also born in a family of Russian Jewish immigrants. Both utilized a large variety of compositional styles, ranging from *jazz* to *folk tunes* or *serialism*, and both wrote successfully for various media - *concert halls*, *theatres* or *films*. Both were keen apostles of American music.

Bernstein, a generation younger, stood more in the limelight in the latter part of the century when his WEST SIDE STORY became **the** musical of our times and his educational TV series gained him huge audiences worldwide. His sensational conducting debut as a last minute substitute in 1943 grew into a spectacular conducting career. His compositions are often on a grand scale such as his mammoth MASS for 200 singers, players and dancers, alongside his three symphonies (same as *Copland*), song cycles, operas, musicals, ballets, film music, etc.

CANDIDE encapsulates what made *Bernstein* universally so popular: gorgeous melodies, infectious rhythms, exuberant orchestrations, the uninhibited and saucy mixture of light and serious, intellectual and intuitive, meditative and joyful - *always* original and *so* often ingenious.

Please note that the **80** min. length of this CD goes well beyond the standard rules! We wanted to present the concert in its entirety in the interest of the *customer*. Rather than leaving out the last track to make the CD fit below the standard 77 min. or spreading the concert on 2 CDs (making the customer pay **twice**), we give a chance to a vast majority of CD owners to hear everything on one 'extended' CD.

No one should have **any problem** in listening to *all but the closing track*. The owners of some older equipment may not have the benefit of playing the **last** track, but everything else will play absolutely fine and every one still gets **far more** than the average value for money!

We trust that our gesture of goodwill will be well received and understood.

Recorded live in **Rudolfinum**, Prague, in 1973. Digitally edited, processed and mastered in Rudolfinum in November 1992 by **Jan Petrusek**.

Technical assistance: **Magdaléna Přihodová**, **Miloslav Přerost** and **Bohuslav Jiříčka**.

Cover/Sleevenote: **Alexander Goldscheider**
