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NSO Study Guide

Appalachian Spring

Aaron Copland

Created By:

Brody Smith, OCT, B.Mus, B.Ed
NSO Education & Outreach Coordinator

Appalachian Spring – Aaron Copland
Program Notes

CONTEXT: APPALACHIAN SPRING was composed in 1943-44 as a ballet for Miss Martha Graham on a commission from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation. It was first performed by Miss Graham and her company at the Coolidge Festival in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on October 30th, 1944.

The original scoring called for a chamber ensemble and was made by the composer in the spring of 1945. It is a condensed version of the ballet, retaining all essential features but omitting those sections in which the interest is primarily choreographic.

The action of the ballet concerns “a pioneer celebration in spring around a newly-built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the last century. The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, their new domestic partnership invites. An older neighbour suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house.”

In 1945 APPALACHIAN SPRING received the Pulitzer Prize for music as well as the award of the Music Critics Circle of New York for the outstanding theatrical work of the season of 1944-45.

STRUCTURE: The work's structure is basically an alternation between energetic dance sections and serene hymn-like interludes. The opening's diatonic simplicity illustrates the familiar and yet foreign world of the Pennsylvania settlers. Gradually, a dance evolves in which excitement and tension are expressed by simple, but not simplistic, harmonic language and clear, brilliant orchestration. As the work continues to alternate between these two basic thematic worlds, the intensity increases with the introduction of more chromatically inflected melodies and harmonies and with a gradual thickening of contrapuntal and orchestral texture. This progression culminates in a set of variations on the well-known Shaker hymn tune “Simple Gifts” in which the dance-like and hymn-like aspects of the work are unified in a purposeful, moving finale.

Study Guide Curriculum Links

Appalachian Spring

Grade 9/10

B1.1 listen to selections that represent a variety of musical styles and genres, and identify and reflect on their personal responses to them (e.g., their initial reaction to an in-class performance by their peers; their favourite contemporary commercial music groups and the aspects of this music that they enjoy; their favourite parts of their band repertoire and what they like about them; the influence of specific pieces, styles, or genres on their arrangements or performance)

B1.2 identify and describe the use of elements and other components of music in a variety of selections, including their performance repertoire (e.g., describe melodic characteristics, rhythmic components, signs and symbols, dynamics, and timbres in the print version of a choral selection before hearing the selection; describe how elements are used for expressive purposes in an arrangement being performed by the class, and how changes in these elements might alter the expressive qualities of the performance; describe technical aspects of a professional performance)

B1.3 describe the difference between technical aspects and expressive aspects of music, with particular emphasis on shaping musical phrases and choosing appropriate tempo, and assess the contribution of both aspects to the successful interpretation of musical selections (e.g., demonstrate both technical and expressive characteristics when interpreting music in performance; address both technical and expressive characteristics when analysing musical performances)

B1.4 conduct research to gather reliable information relating to specific music, musicians, and the musical opinions of others, and describe the impact this information has had on their own opinions or assessments (e.g., listen to, read about, and discuss with their peers a selection of music by a contemporary artist or group; assess the reliability of the judgements expressed in their sources; describe how a particular source has influenced their opinions and/or why a different source has not influenced them)

B2.1 identify and describe ways in which traditional music reflects the society in which it was created and how it has affected communities or cultures (e.g., the Celtic influence on East Coast fiddle music as a reflection of historical immigration patterns to Canada, and how this music has contributed to the local community; the focus of the music in ceremonies and celebrations of some of Canada's Aboriginal peoples; how instruments and scale patterns used in traditional Chinese music contributed to the creation and preservation of a distinct musical style in China)

C1.1 demonstrate an understanding of the elements of music, particularly through practical application and aural recognition, and use appropriate terminology related to these elements (e.g., describe scales and scale patterns, and perform them with appropriate dynamic contrasts and articulation and varied rhythms; describe the main characteristics of a variety of styles of music with reference to their use of elements, and use accompaniment software programs to demonstrate them; identify the elements of music in a range of aural samples; use correct terminology to describe the elements of music in a selection they are preparing for performance; identify and describe various textures in music [monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic])

C3.2 demonstrate an understanding of conventions related to music performance, with reference to both performers and audience members (e.g., demonstrate respect for others within the ensemble; respond to non-verbal communication from the conductor's podium; explain why the audience might applaud in the middle of a piece performed by a jazz quartet but not by a classical orchestra)

Grade 11/12

B1.1 deconstruct the elements and other components in musical works through **score study** and purposeful listening (e.g., identify the individual elements of music in their performance repertoire and/or in aural selections, interpret their function, and analyse how the composer has manipulated them to create specific effects; analyse the form and effect of the first movement of a classical symphony, with reference to the repetition and variation of specific elements of music; identify and analyse the use of elements in improvised music)

B1.2 listen to and reflect on selections from a wide range of musical styles and genres, including their own performance repertoire, and analyse and reflect with increasing insight on their responses to and interpretation of them (e.g., explain their initial reaction to a selection whose genre or form they are not familiar with; explain their interpretation of a Canadian avant-garde selection; reflect and report on how their response to a selection of music has changed from initial reaction, to increased understanding as a result of background research, and to critical analysis as a result of repeated and focused listening)

B1.3 analyse with increasing insight and assess the effectiveness of music from a wide range of styles and genres and in various performance modes, and reflect on how such analyses can enhance their own creation or performance of music (e.g., assess the effectiveness of a selection that represents a significant form of Western music, such as a symphony, a concerto, an opera, or an art song, in communicating to its audiences, and analyse how the work achieves its purpose; analyse the aesthetic and technical features of various forms of jazz, and evaluate the effect of the music on the performer and listener; assess the impact and effectiveness of a taiko ensemble)

B1.4 gather information from a range of reliable sources on music history, composers and musicians, technical and/or aesthetic criticism, and audience responses, and analyse, critique, and reflect on the information with increasing insight to enhance their critical judgement and ongoing interpretation of music (e.g., gather and analyse data on audience responses to one of their performances, either individual or as part of an ensemble; investigate the cultural context and critical opinion of the work of a non-Western musician, evaluate the information, and compare it to their own opinion; investigate the purpose, cultural context, technical complexities, and elements of a selection of contemporary Aboriginal music; analyse the work of a professional media critic or musicologist, and use it as a model for their own criticism of music)

B3.1 analyse and assess the impact of the study of music on their self-awareness, their expressive capabilities, their awareness of social issues, and their understanding of others (e.g., their awareness of, and their ability to express, personal responses to a wide range of music from a variety of cultures; the ability to support their own opinions while demonstrating respect for the opinions of others; the ability to express their ideas, concerns, and emotions creatively; their knowledge of and respect for other cultures; their awareness of current and historical social issues as expressed through song)

B2.2 analyse the impact that significant individuals or groups from a variety of cultures (e.g., African Guitar Summit, Joan Baez, Nadia Boulanger, Ry Cooder, Ella Fitzgerald, Peter Gabriel, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Clara Schumann) have had on traditional, commercial, and/or art music

B2.3 analyse the interrelationships between traditional, commercial, and art music (e.g., the influence of traditional and commercial music on the art music of George Gershwin; the use by pop songwriters from a variety of cultures of themes or melodies from art music; the integration of traditional blues riffs in rock 'n' roll; the impact of globalization on music)

C1.1 extend their understanding of the elements and other components of music, particularly through practical application and aural recognition, and use appropriate terminology related to these elements (e.g., describe in detail elements of music as they relate to course repertoire and a broad range of aural examples; describe, recognize, and perform major, melodic and harmonic minor, whole tone, chromatic, and various blues scales; identify simple and compound intervals, as well as major, minor, and diminished triads; describe and demonstrate dominant, diminished, major, and minor seventh chords; describe and demonstrate cadences, including perfect, imperfect, and plagal; recognize various forms and aspects of form, such as strophic form, sonata form, refrain, motif, bridge, oratorio, vocables in Native American songs)

C1.2 extend their understanding of, and use correct terminology related to, the concepts of notation in a variety of activities (e.g., demonstrate an understanding of increasingly complex notation symbols by reading or writing notation when playing, singing, arranging, and composing; identify and notate accurately the seven standard diatonic modes; accurately notate increasingly complex or difficult melodies and rhythmic patterns; demonstrate an understanding of scoring formats for various small and larger ensembles; identify sound layering in increasingly complex voicings)

C2.1 demonstrate an understanding of the development and function and/or theme of various musical forms and conventions (e.g., outline the part of the Catholic mass that best illustrates the use of cantus firmus; explain the use of overtures in opera and musical theatre; trace the development of instruments over time; create a CD of musical excerpts to illustrate the evolution of the concerto form)

C2.2 analyse, on the basis of research, and report on the characteristics of and ideas in traditional and contemporary music, including Aboriginal music, from Canada and around the world (e.g., analyse shared characteristics of West African and Cuban music; research and report on connections between music and nature; interview a First Nation musician and share his or her experiences and perspectives with their peers)

C3.2 extend their understanding of conventions associated with various types of musical performances, from the perspective of performers and audience members (e.g., the set-up of and responsibilities in a symphony orchestra; the use of surtitles at operas; how musical genres such as jazz or punk rock challenged traditional musical conventions)

“Appalachian Spring” Assessments

GRADES 9 & 10

Ontario Curriculum Links: B2.1, B1.4

Appalachian Spring uses a Shaker melody called “Tis the gift to be simple”, also known as “Simple Gifts”. Research the group of people known as the “Shakers” and describe their musical significance. How does the composer of Appalachian Spring – Aaron Copland – use the “Simple Gifts” melody in his piece?

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.1, B1.2, C1.1

Listen to Appalachian Spring and make notes regarding the emotions you feel, the reactions you have, and your responses to the music.

- What was your initial reaction?
- What did you enjoy and why did you enjoy it?
 - Explain using the elements of music
- What didn't you enjoy and why did you not enjoy it?
 - Explain using the elements of music

Evaluation: 2 marks for clearly explaining their initial reaction. 1 mark for each element of music included in each opinion question (4 marks per question).

Total: out of 10

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.1, B1.2, C1.1

Use the following Listening Guide to guide your understanding of Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

<https://edpuzzle.com/media/5cb0ce654c3f1640fcfbf449>

Answer the questions throughout the video and record your answers on a sheet of paper.

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.3, B1.4, C3.2

Attend a rehearsal of *Appalachian Spring* and reflect on the expressive elements of music applied by the conductor and the orchestra. Practice good audience etiquette. How does this performance differ from the recordings you have listened to? Reflect on your opinion of the piece after hearing it rehearsed live.

GRADES 11 & 12

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.3, B2.2, B2.3, C2.1, C2.2

Appalachian Spring uses a Shaker melody called “Tis the gift to be simple”, also known as “Simple Gifts”. Research the group of people known as the “Shakers” and describe their musical significance. How does the composer of Appalachian Spring – Aaron Copland – use the “Simple Gifts” melody in his piece? How might Shaker hymns have inspired Aaron Copland while composing *Appalachian Spring* and the story/choreography that goes along with it?

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.1, B1.2, B1.4, B3.1, C1.1, C1.2

Listen to Appalachian Spring and make notes regarding the emotions you feel, the reactions you have, and your responses to the music. Use the following Listening Guide to help you:

<https://edpuzzle.com/media/5cb0ce654c3f1640fcfbf449>

- What was your initial reaction?
- What did you enjoy and why did you enjoy it?
 - Explain using the elements of music
- What didn't you enjoy and why did you not enjoy it?
 - Explain using the elements of music
- Choose 2 contrasting movements from *Appalachian Spring* and study the score. Compare and contrast these movements using musical terminology and your understanding of musical practices.
- Create a revised review of *Appalachian Spring*, referencing other reliable reviews (i.e. historians, musicologists, media reports, etc.).

Reflection: How has studying Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* impacted your opinion of the piece, and your abilities to express musical ideas?

Ontario Curriculum Links: B1.3, B1.4, C3.2

Attend a rehearsal of *Appalachian Spring* and reflect on the expressive elements of music applied by the conductor and the orchestra. Practice good audience etiquette. How does this performance differ from the recordings you have listened to? Reflect on your opinion of the piece after hearing it rehearsed live.