Bonus Online Chapter

13

# Actively Listening to Additional Works

## Special Supplement to *Take Note* by Robin Wallace

This bonus chapter provides supplementary listening activities for *Take Note* by Robin Wallace. It is only available online from the *Take Note* companion website. It is provided for those students and instructors who would like to practice active listening skills on additional works. This chapter introduces four major works spanning Medieval to Modern music.

### TAKE NOTE

Active listening skills can be applied to any musical experience. Draw upon the fundamental elements of music to appreciate familiar and unfamiliar works.

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## Chapter Objectives

- Refine your active listening skills by spending some time with four major works not previously discussed.
- Examine the context for those works in further detail, expanding on the ideas introduced in Chapters 10 through 12.
- Challenge yourself to spend more time getting to know these and similar works.

### Chronology of Music Discussed in this Chapter

circa 1199
**Perotinus p. W2**
*Sederunt principes*

1741
**George Frideric Handel p. W7**
*Messiah*

1878
**Johannes Brahms p. W11**
Violin Concerto in D major, op. 77

circa 1942
**Aaron Copland p. W15**
*Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo*

Like an empty concert hall, a work of music leaves many questions unanswered, requiring us to expand our knowledge and bring our imagination to bear.

By this point in the course, you have deepened your understanding of musical elements and music's history through active listening practices. In the last three chapters, you looked at music in its relationship to other arts—poetry, drama, and story-telling. You learned how each of the works discussed in Chapters 10 through 12 exists in a broader context.

In the operas *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Otello*, we saw how composers have transformed drama to meet the demands of the musical stage. Through its context, music like this acquires and bestows fresh meaning. We have also explored the meaning of music even when it does *not* have words.

In this chapter, you will hone your active listening skills with some other major works. You will learn to pose questions like those raised earlier when encountering any unfamiliar music. You may begin thinking about the nature of music and about what makes it unique. In doing so, try to draw on the vocabulary you have learned from this book, but feel free to develop your own language for talking about what happens in the music as well. Describing music in words is not a precise art. Learning to do it, though, is an important part of becoming a good listener.

Note: Recordings of the works discussed in this chapter are widely available from your library or from a music service such as iTunes. See the book's companion website for an iTunes playlist of these selections.

# Perotinus, *Sederunt Principes*

*Sederunt principes* is one of the best-known examples of medieval music. It was written in approximately 1199 in France. Everything else we know about it—even what it should sound like in performance—is conjecture. Does that sounds like an unreliable context for listening? What makes this music so important? Before we give up hope of becoming attentive listeners, consider the following scenario.

You have decided to write a term paper on the history of music in *your* town. You interview people who seem to know something about your community's music during the "golden age" of the early 20th century. Although they themselves were not alive at the time, they remember people who were and recall their stories. Those people agree that the two most prominent musicians back then were named Bob and Wendy. Bob was a virtuoso on the hammer dulcimer, and Wendy could make her voice do things that nobody had managed before.

In the 27th century, your paper is discovered by someone rummaging through an old house. She happens to be a collector of old shellac 78 rpm records, and she is intrigued by your mention of Bob and Wendy. No one she knows has heard of them before. Listening to a record discovered in Waxahachie, Texas, she notices some particularly skilled hammer dulcimer playing, while another record features unusual female vocal timbres. Similar sounds turn up on stray discs from other large collections found in Walla Walla, Washington, and Florence, South Carolina.

Unfortunately, the labels of these records have long since been destroyed, and the sound quality is poor. Still, armed with your paper, the collector develops an intriguing hypothesis: The two people on these records must be Bob and Wendy. Further support for this conclusion emerges in your own town, when a municipal archive is discovered in a sub-basement of the city hall. In it is a decree from the town council, dated October 16, 1907, commending a performance at that year's county fair. In *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*, a hammer dulcimer accompanied a talented but unusual female singer. And, yes, *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* is one of the songs in the Waxahachie, Walla Walla, and Florence collections.

Thanks to your paper and the collector's discoveries, scholars now refer to the "County Fair School" of hammer dulcimer playing and singing, and they hear its influence in later recordings from throughout the country. Bob and Wendy are duly acknowledged as among the most important American musicians of the 20th century.

If this sounds fanciful, read on. We have discovered the very special character of some medieval music in much the same way.

Links to an iTunes playlist of recommended recordings of this work are found on the book's companion website.

## The Setting

The 12th century was a time of economic and intellectual growth in Western Europe. The great Gothic cathedrals began to be built, including Notre Dame de Paris, which took over a hundred years from start to finish. The University of Paris was founded, and the population of the city grew dramatically. The arts, including music, were cultivated extensively.

We can see how much music was valued in some surviving decrees by Eudes de Sully, the bishop of Paris. Dated 1199, they grant permission for music in three or four parts to be performed on certain liturgical occasions. Among these was the Gradual (one of the Propers—those portions of the Mass that, unlike the Ordinary, are only performed on particular occasions) of the Mass for the Feast of St. Stephen, the day after Christmas. You are probably familiar with the Christmas carol that begins: "Good King Wenceslas looked out / On the Feast of Stephen." As we will hear, the chant of the Gradual for St. Stephen's Day underlies the entire composition of *Sederunt principes*.

St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr, stoned to death after preaching a sermon to the ruling council. Appropriately, the text of the Gradual for the commemoration of this event is taken from the book of Psalms: "Princes sat and spoke against me, persecuting me unjustly" (Psalm 119:23/86) and "Help me, Lord my God; make me whole out of thy mercy" (Psalm 6:4).

Perotinus, of course, set the text in Latin:

> *Sederunt principes et adversum me loquebantur: et iniqui persecuti sunt me.*
> *Adiuva me, Domine Deus meus: Salvum me fac propter misericordiam tuam.*

Copies of this music have been found in three manuscripts from the 13th century. Its origins would be unknown if not for an anonymous treatise written by an English student at the University of Paris late in that century. Anonymous IV, as he is widely known, discusses the state of music in Paris a century earlier. He attributes this and similar works to "Magister Perotinus," who was probably known in French by the nickname Perotin, or "little Pierre." Anonymous IV mentions that he improved upon the work of "Magister Leoninus" ("little Leo"), who was the greatest writer of organum, a form of early polyphonic music.

We really know very little about who Perotinus was. It appears likely that he worked at some point at Notre Dame de Paris, which was still under construction at the time. For this reason, he and Leoninus are said to represent the "Notre Dame School" of composition. That makes Notre Dame one of the most important centers of musical activity in the late Middle Ages—and Leoninus and Perotinus among the most influential composers of all time.

## The Genre

*Sederunt principes* belongs to the genre called organum, which actually describes a wide range of early polyphonic music. In fact, we might think of *Sederunt principes* as containing three distinct styles of music.

The first of these styles, Gregorian chant, was the officially approved liturgical music of the Catholic Church throughout the Middle Ages and well beyond. In portions of *Sederunt principes*, the chant of the Gradual for St. Stephen's Day is heard in its original form. Listen to the section reading "*Principes et adversum me loquebantur: et iniqui persecuti sunt me.*" It would be inaccurate to say that Perotinus wrote the music heard at this point.

The second style is *organum purum*, or pure organum. In this style, the notes of the original chant are held for extremely long periods. Meanwhile, three other parts weave long strings of faster notes around them. Listen to the first three minutes of the piece and the section beginning "*Adiuva me*." Since each note of the chant receives this treatment, and each one is drawn out, the first word alone takes three minutes! After that word, however, the music reverts to chant, beginning with the word "*principes*."

The third style is called *discant, clausula*, or *discant clausula*. In this style, the part singing the chant moves much more quickly and rhythmically, although still more slowly, than the other parts, which move rhythmically as well. Listen to the second syllable of the word "*adiuva*." Further examples of clausula style are heard throughout the setting of the second line of text.

Each style has its own distinct rhythm and texture. The chant sections are monophonic and have no regular meter. The organum sections are polyphonic and rhythmic, while the clausula sections are polyphonic and even more highly rhythmic.

So far, Perotinus may seem to combine these three styles with little rhyme or reason. By modern criteria, the work may appear to lack unity. It may seem like a hodge-podge, with original music grafted onto older music. However, as we will see next, Perotinus's decisions about which parts to set in which style were not as arbitrary as they might appear.

## How the Music Was Written

We don't really know much about how Perotinus wrote this music. The first manuscripts date from the next century and were written by somebody else. It is probably fair to speculate, though, that the process of composition was additive: Perotinus started with the Gregorian Gradual and decorated it musically. The original notation did not look like written music does today.

Perotinus used *organum* or *discant clausula* style only for parts that would have been sung by the cantor, or soloist. These included the opening word, which the cantor sang as an intonation, so the other singers could pick up the pitch. They also included most of the second line, up to the word "*tuam*," which would have been sung by the choir after a long solo by the cantor. When there was a great deal of text to be sung, as in this section, clausula style could be used to speed things up.

Perotinus also used a system of rhythmic notation that was very different from what is in use today. It allowed him to notate rhythmic patterns (called "modes" by Anonymous IV), but it does not show precisely the deviations from those patterns. Thus, his music can sound rhythmically monotonous in modern performance.

## Performance Tradition

Based on the testimony of Anonymous IV and on several important manuscripts, we can surmise that this music was performed frequently in Paris in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, and perhaps elsewhere as well. However, musical notation was then developing quickly. Within less than one hundred years, musicians would have had trouble even reading the notes. It is thus safe to say that for nearly 700 years this music was not performed at all.

In the 20th century, interest in Medieval music was rekindled, and tentative transcriptions were made into modern notation. Even the improved transcriptions that have followed, though, leave many questions unanswered. We do not know exactly how to interpret Perotinus's rhythmic notation. Neither do we know exactly how fast he expected the music to go, or what kinds of dynamics, phrasing and other interpretive nuances he would have expected. It is quite likely that musicians in his time would have known to add things that were not written down—much as jazz musicians do today.

Issues like these almost always arise when music has been out of circulation for a long time. When there is no living performance tradition, performers must guess about many things. They will rely on their own intuition—a kind of "musical

common sense." They also have a unique opportunity to create a performance tradition where none has existed before. For all these reasons, performers and listeners alike often debate about what counts as an "authentic" performance.

An example of the kind of question they face is whether to include women. We know that women would have been banned from taking part in the original performances, since they were not allowed to sing in church during the Middle Ages. Such strictures are no longer in effect. Should women now be allowed to participate, or should they be excluded in an attempt to create a more authentic sound?

Performers also face a problem when it comes to the long, sustained notes from the original chant, during the organum sections. On paper, they must hold some of these notes for a minute or more, which is longer than most people can hold their breath. Should these notes be played by instruments? Or should several singers stagger their breaths to produce a continuous tone?

## Perotinus and the Middle Ages

It would be a mistake to take *Sederunt principes* as a typical example of Medieval music. What makes it so interesting is precisely that it is unique. Only one other similar piece survives: the Gradual *Viderunt omnes*, which Anonymous IV also attributed to Perotinus. There is also a short four-voice clausula written on a single word: *Mors* ("Death").

The Notre Dame School as a whole represents a high point in the development of polyphonic music and of musical notation. Two hundred years after Perotinus, nobody would have recognized his name, and his music had disappeared. Yet the influence of the Notre Dame School in the later Middle Ages can be compared to that of Beethoven on the music since his own time. Without it, the history of music would have been very different, in ways that are hard to imagine.

## *Sederunt principes* in Today's World

In the past half century, Perotinus's music has been widely performed and recorded. Like most early music, it is performed only by specialists. However, when you listen to *Sederunt principes*, it is important to remember that you are not really hearing music from the Middle Ages. You are hearing modern performers interpret and attempt to recreate that music. This makes the experience of listening very different from that of looking at medieval art or visiting a Gothic cathedral like Notre Dame. You can look at actual physical artifacts created more than 800 years ago, but music always takes place in the present.

On the other hand, even when you look at a cathedral, you are not seeing or experiencing what its creators would have seen and experienced. Notre Dame is now in the middle of a modern city. We see it in a context of skyscrapers and the Eiffel Tower. Its spires, which once dominated the surrounding landscape, now have to compete with other gravity-defying architecture. Our experience of this building is a modern one, and so is our experience of the music that was written for it.

## *If You Liked This Music . . .*

### Contemporary Performers of Music from the Middle Ages

There are many performers and groups who specialize in the music of the Middle Ages. Among them:

- **Anonymous 4** is a group of women who sing a cappella. Their repertory links Medieval music with American folk music and hymns.
- **David Munrow**, who died in 1976, introduced many people to early instruments and performing styles with his many recorded albums, most of which are still available. His *Music of the Gothic Era* is the source of the Machaut motet in your listening.
- **The Hilliard Ensemble** is a British all-male vocal group that has made extensive recordings of both Medieval and Renaissance music.
- **Gothic Voices**, directed by Christopher Page, is a British vocal group that has recorded a wide range of Medieval and early Renaissance music. They also perform works written for them by contemporary composers: another example of the early music/Contemporary link.

## Questions for Further Study

1. Compare the recording of *Sederunt principes* by the Hilliard Ensemble, made in 1988, with that made by the Deller Consort in the early 1960s. How would you describe the differences?
2. Look at a picture of the interior of Notre Dame de Paris. Does this music seem appropriate to performance in such a space? Why or why not?
3. What do you believe is the connection between the text and the music in this piece? Remember the three levels of text-music association discussed in Chapter 10: semantic, syntactic, and phonetic.
4. What are the musical ideals suggested by this music, and how do they differ from those of most Western music of the past 300 years? Be as specific as you can, based on the elements of music covered in Chapters 5 through 9.

# Handel, *Messiah*

*Messiah*, composed by George Frideric Handel (1685–1759) in 1741, contains some of the most familiar music in the world. Many churches and civic organizations perform the work virtually every year, usually in the weeks before Christmas. The *Hallelujah* chorus, which concludes its second part, is a highly recognizable “sound bite.”

*Messiah* is also a work that many people assume they need no guidance to understand. If you are an orthodox Christian, its premise is self-explanatory: Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the person of Christ. However, as Anthony Hicks writes in *Grove Music Online*, *Messiah* “achieved its eventual status as the most famous of all oratorios by articulating its statement of faith with music absolutely direct in its appeal, and in which the sense of progress from hope through despair to triumph is meaningful even for those who do not share Christian belief.”

The work, in other words, is universal: Much like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, it addresses themes to which everybody can respond. That, it seems, is why so many people go to hear *Messiah* every Christmas season regardless of their religious beliefs. Let us learn more about this work and see if these initial impressions are borne out.

Links to an iTunes playlist of recommended recordings of this work are found on the book's companion website.

## The Setting

Handel was born in Germany, but lived most of his adult life in England. This is not as strange as it may seem. The English kings in the 18th century were from Germany themselves. They came from Hanover, where Handel worked in his mid-20s. During his first few decades in London, Handel wrote and produced operas in Italian, which to modern ears may sound as logical as an American composer living in Mexico City writing and producing operas in German. In the last two decades of his life, he stopped writing operas and virtually created the genre of the English oratorio, of which *Messiah* is the most famous example.

London in Handel's time was not yet the commercial metropolis that it became in the 19th century, as the British Empire spread around the world. It was, however, the largest city in Europe and most likely the world, and there was abundant money to be spent there on entertainment. Handel was a smart enough businessman to take advantage of this fact.

## The Genre

Oratorios—essentially unstaged operas, often (but not always) on Biblical themes—had existed since the 17th century. They were traditionally performed during Lent, the season before Easter, when the theaters were closed.

*Messiah* was one of the earliest oratorios in English. It was also one of the first that did not directly tell a story. Instead, it leaves the audience to piece together the meaning from the texts of the different musical numbers. It was first performed in Dublin in April 1742, and then in London the following year.

## How the Music Was Written

The libretto for *Messiah* was compiled by Charles Jennens, who had already collaborated with Handel on two other works. Jennens drew his texts from the King James Bible and from the psalter of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Handel wrote the music very quickly, during a period of about three weeks in late August and early September of 1741. As was typical with Handel, some of the music was adapted from earlier works of his.

## Performance Tradition

Like Handel's other oratorios, *Messiah* was performed in theaters, not churches, and admission was charged. It was originally performed by a choir of about 16 highly trained professional singers, with an orchestra of fewer than 25 players. Later, the work was often rescored for a larger orchestra—one of the first to do this was Mozart—and performed by much larger groups. By the mid-19th century, it was

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not unusual for the choir to consist of several hundred singers, and choirs of over a thousand were not unheard of.

In the later 20th century, as the early music movement grew in influence, there was a move back to smaller ensembles. However, the tradition of performing *Messiah* with very large groups has also continued. Sometimes, members of the audience are encouraged to bring scores and participate, too.

Performances of *Messiah* now often take place in churches, leading to the mistaken impression that it was originally a church composition. It would be more accurate to see it as a sacred work, but, unlike *Sederunt principes*, not a *liturgical* one. Remember that it was first performed in a theater, and tickets were sold. It was a commercial enterprise, leading to charges of blasphemy at its initial appearance.

## Handel and the Baroque

The music of *Messiah* is deliberately old-fashioned. By 1741, very few composers were writing in Baroque style, and some of the music of Handel's operas is as much Classical as it is Baroque. His use of large fugal choruses in this work was hence a step backward. It can perhaps be compared to the language of the King James Bible, which was already old-fashioned at the time it was translated. Or think of the Biblical films of Cecil B. DeMille, with their imposing, epic scale!

Like much Baroque music, though, *Messiah* is also rooted in the musical practices of its time. This is evident in Handel's use of operatic styles and in his frequent incorporation of dance rhythms, which would have been easily recognizable to his contemporaries. The solos are divided into recitatives and arias, as in 18th-century operas. Like many other numbers in *Messiah*, the opening aria, "Every valley," makes use of *text painting*: musical "illustration" of phrases like "the crooked straight, and the rough places plain." "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion," in its original 12/8 version, which can be heard on some recordings, is a gigue: the Frenchified adaptation of the Irish jig that frequently concludes Baroque suites. Such seemingly secular features are the rule rather than the exception in *Messiah*.

## Sacred and Secular Meanings

Like all music that has withstood the test of time, *Messiah* has meant different things to different people and at different points in its history. At first, as we saw, it was understood as a nonliturgical, theatrical work on a Biblical theme, combining traditional and contemporary elements. By the mid-19th century, it was widely seen as a sacred work and an embodiment of musical tradition. Even today, it continues to be seen that way while simultaneously being heard in pared-down, early-music versions that have sought to make it less imposing and more accessible.

The religious meaning of the work is seemingly straightforward. Like DeMille's epics, however, it has broad appeal as entertainment. As Anthony Hicks suggests, it also has a narrative contour, progressing "from hope through despair to triumph," that can be understood without reference to its specifically Christian content. Such an understanding is perhaps encouraged by the early music versions mentioned above, which tend to avoid the exaggerated religiosity of other modern performances.

The work's content, though, is also specific enough to provoke controversy. Those who do not share Jennens's view of Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy might be offended by the casual way in which it is assumed in *Messiah*.

## *Messiah* in Today's World

*Messiah* epitomizes the very idea of classical music: that a permanent repertory of great works has remained current for decades or even centuries and will continue to do so. No work of music seems more firmly entrenched. Its tunefulness endears it to audiences. Generations of singers have enjoyed performing its challenging choruses. Amateur singers may do so at much slower tempos than Handel intended. Its orthodox religious content has given it wide appeal as well. It is now virtually identified with the Christmas season, even though it was written with Easter in mind.

The work also foreshadows later controversies in church music, although today's audiences are generally unaware of this fact. Handel adopted musical styles with broad popular appeal, but he also emphasized professionalism in performance. This initially made the work controversial. In fact, "contemporary" styles and polished, professional performances in church are still controversial today. *Messiah* has entered that controversy directly through performances like *The Young Messiah* and *Messiah: A Soulful Celebration*. Both of these versions use the music as a starting point for performances in Gospel-related styles.

## *If You Liked This Music . . .*

### Other Works of Handel

All of Handel's oratorios are now available in good recordings, so there is a wide variety of works to choose from for further listening. Some recommendations:

- ***Israel in Egypt*** is one of the most popular of Handel's works. It contains vivid, dramatic choruses that illustrate the plagues of Egypt and the Exodus.
- ***Jephtha*** contains moving dramatizations of a grisly story in which a father is called on to sacrifice his daughter, who then, in a sudden (and un-Biblical) intervention, is spared. The chorus "How dark, O Lord, are thy decrees" is widely thought to reflect Handel's reaction to his growing blindness.
- ***L'Allegro, il Penseroro ed il Moderato***, based on two poems by Milton, highlights Handel's ability to portray both contrasting emotions and vivid scenes from nature in evocative music.

## Questions for Further Study

1. How much of the music of *Messiah* sounds familiar to you? In what different contexts have you heard this music? Have you ever taken part in a performance?
2. What ideas and expectations do you bring to this music? Does it resonate with you as a religious work? As a symbol of Christmas? As something else?
3. If you are now at the end of the fall semester, do a field study. Carry around a notebook for the last few weeks of the term and record every time you hear

music that you recognize as being from *Messiah*—particularly the "Hallelujah" chorus. What can you conclude about the number of instances and the various contexts in which they occur?

4. Which sections of *Messiah* appeal to you more: the choruses or the vocal solos (recitatives and arias)? Can you explain the reason for your preference?
5. Do you notice musical differences between the solos and the choruses? How do they compare in terms of form? In terms of texture?
6. When *Messiah* is performed at Christmas, the last of the three parts, known as the Easter portion, is frequently omitted. What do you think of this practice? Is it acceptable to change and adapt classical works to the circumstances in which they are performed? Why or why not?
7. Read Michael Marissen's article "Unsettling History of That Joyous 'Hallelujah,'" which appeared in *The New York Times* on April 8, 2007. It is easily accessible through the paper's website. Do the points Marissen raises affect your understanding of and appreciation for *Messiah*? Why or why not?

## Brahms, Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 77

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) has always been a controversial composer. Living in the late 19th century, he continued to write music in the Classical forms of Mozart and Beethoven. At the time, composers like Wagner and Smetana were embracing change, and many considered Brahms old-fashioned. Yet his music was very much a product of its time—and even forward-looking.

The violin concerto, written in 1878, is a good example. *Solo concertos*, or works for a solo instrument and orchestra, began to appear as long ago as the late 17th century. The brilliance of the solo parts still gives concertos wide popular appeal, and many orchestral concerts feature a well-known soloist. Historically, the solo concerto is a more recent development than the concerto for multiple instruments or the orchestral concerto, even though composers still occasionally write in those forms as well. Brahms wrote a concerto for violin and cello, and in the 20th century, Bartók write a well-known *Concerto for Orchestra*.

For a late 19th-century concerto, though, this one is strikingly traditional. Other concertos of this time—for example, those by Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saens, and Grieg—bring in the solo instrument right at the beginning. Brahms adheres to the older practice, also followed by Bach, of starting with an orchestral *ritornello*. Because Brahms's work is on a very large scale, the solo violin is not heard at all for nearly three minutes. The first movement alone lasts longer than all three movements of the Bach concerto.

Brahms adopts an even more old-fashioned practice as well. About five minutes before the end of the first movement, the violinist improvises alone, while the orchestra remains silent. This extended solo passage is called a cadenza. Improvised cadenzas were common in the 18th century, much like jazz solos today. Mozart and Beethoven were well known for improvising at the piano. By the mid-19th century, however, fewer classical performers improvised. Composers preferred to write out cadenza-like passages in full. When modern classical performers play

older concertos, they usually play a written-out cadenza as well, sometimes composed long after the work itself. Both Beethoven and Brahms, for example, wrote cadenzas for Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor, K. 466.

By 1878, then, it was highly unusual for a composer simply to leave a place for an unwritten cadenza. Brahms no doubt knew that he could trust the violinist at the first performance, his friend Joseph Joachim, to play something appropriate. Joachim's written-out cadenza has been used by many later performers, too, although others have written cadenzas of their own. Regardless, a cadenza at this point gives the work an archaic quality.

Brahms also wrote for a much smaller orchestra than many late 19th-century composers. His orchestra is more like Beethoven's than like his older contemporary Wagner's. Compared to those of Wagner, his harmonies are also conservative.

In its expressive range and virtuosity, however, this is definitely a late Romantic work. It runs over 40 minutes, and is extremely difficult to play. In other respects, it is actually forward-looking. Listen particularly to the unusual rhythmic combinations in the last movement. Even Brahms's harmonies are more advanced than is often recognized.

Links to an iTunes playlist of recommended recordings of this work are found on the book's companion website.

## The Setting

By the late 19th century, the German-speaking countries had a long and proud tradition of musical culture that was taken very seriously. It is probably hard for contemporary Americans to imagine the prestige that was attached to symphonic composition in Brahms's time. Beethoven was an unquestioned cultural icon. His nine symphonies formed and still form the core of the permanent classical repertory. Composers like Liszt and Wagner claimed to be following his example by moving music forward. Arnold Schoenberg made the same claim in the early 20th century. Wagner himself called the symphony an antiquated form.

Brahms, on the other hand, tried to preserve Beethoven's legacy by continuing to write symphonies. It was not easy going. Brahms was 43 years old when his first symphony was performed in 1876. By the time they had reached this age, Haydn had written sixty symphonies and Beethoven eight; Mozart and Schubert were long dead. Why did it take Brahms so long?

A large part of the answer is that he was intimidated. Any new symphony was automatically compared with those by Beethoven, often unfavorably. Once Brahms acquired a reputation as a composer in traditional styles, the pressure grew even more intense. His first symphony was inevitably seen as a manifesto: he had rejected Wagner's claim that the symphony was a thing of the past. A small-scale work would not have served this purpose, so Brahms's first symphony is self-consciously "important."

Once he had cleared the air, though, Brahms apparently felt more relaxed. His second symphony appeared just a year later, and his violin concerto the year after that. This was only his second concerto: he approached the concerto, too, as a major form, and he again invited comparisons to Beethoven. He chose the key of D major—the same key as that of Beethoven's only violin concerto.

## The Genre

Solo concertos were popular favorites, and during the 19th century, the concert-going public grew rapidly as incomes rose and leisure time also increased. Beethoven had already helped to elevate the concerto into a large-scale form with potentially deep significance (as in his "Emperor" Concerto, op. 73, for piano). Thus, by the mid-19th century, a new concerto was expected to be long and difficult to play. Virtuosos like Liszt and Nicolò Paganini (1782–1840) had written their own concertos to show off their performing styles. Playing a concerto remains to this day a kind of musical Olympic competition, and only the foremost athletes can hope to compete.

## How the Music Was Written

Joseph Joachim (1831–1907) was one of the leading violinists of the day and a close friend of Brahms. In their youth, they had given concert tours together, with Brahms in the role of piano accompanist. Since Brahms was not himself a violinist, he sought Joachim's advice about what the instrument could do, and he rewrote several passages accordingly.

Brahms's works often went through several stages. For the concerto, he originally planned four movements. This would have made the symphonic scale even more evident, since most concertos follow a three-movement structure: fast-slow-fast. Eventually, though, Brahms replaced the two inner movements with an Adagio second movement.

## Performance Tradition

Joachim first performed the work on January 1, 1879, and for many years, few others would attempt it. It was considered not only extremely difficult, but also not gratifying enough to the performer. To this day it remains less popular than the violin concertos of such late 19th-century composers as Tchaikovsky and Max Bruch (1838–1920). Its prestige is still great, however, and virtually every prominent violinist performs it.

## Brahms and the Romantic Period

We should not think of Brahms as simply a conservative. He also embodied the musical culture of his time. As the concert-going public expanded, so did interest in hearing older music. At the beginning of the 19th century, concert audiences expected to hear mostly recent works, with an admixture of already familiar works by living composers. Think of a rock concert today. By the end of the century, concerts typically contained at least as much old music. Often the program went in chronological order, to show a coherent tradition.

By writing new music in well-established forms, Brahms was able to gratify both the public's taste for novelty and its craving for tradition. He is thus more than a figure of his time. He also inspired many later classical composers who have wedded the past with the present. In fact, the resurgence of earlier music continued and even accelerated in the 20th century, as the revival of Perotinus discussed in this chapter shows. The American minimalist composer Steve Reich (b. 1936) has found inspiration in Perotinus's music, much as Brahms did in that of Beethoven and Bach.

## Classical and Popular Styles

Brahms may appear the ultimate composer of art music. He was contributing to a classical repertory with a long historical tradition. His music is difficult and often uncompromising.

Brahms has another side, however. He was one of the most financially successful composers in history, and he wrote music to capitalize on popular taste. Brahms lived in the Vienna of Johann Strauss, and he wrote waltzes of his own. He also arranged folk songs and composed music for amateur musicians, including works for small choral ensembles and for piano four hands (that is, two players), a popular medium of home entertainment in the days before recordings (see Chapter 1). In fact, his *Hungarian Dances* for four hands were his most successful compositions and inspired Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*.

Elements of the waltz and of Hungarian gypsy music can also be found in Brahms's more serious compositions. The last movement of the violin concerto, for example, evokes the fiddle playing that was common in coffee-houses in Vienna. Brahms relished this music for its spontaneity and rhythmic freedom.

Brahms may have drawn on popular styles, but he was hardly subversive. Most earlier composers did the same thing, at least to an extent, and classical and popular styles still sprang from the same soil. It was only after Brahms's death that they went in completely different directions. In the 19th century, European art music was still pre-eminent for both musicians and the public. In the 20th century, American popular music usurped that position. A composer who seeks to blend popular and classical styles now faces a much greater challenge. As we will see next, a 20th-century American composer, Aaron Copland, found a new kind of solution.

## *If You Liked This Music . . .*

### Other Late Romantic Concertos

There are many late Romantic concertos that illustrate the dazzling virtuosity typical of this genre. Among the most popular:

- The Violin Concerto in D major, op. 35, by Tchaikovsky, makes an interesting contrast with the Brahms work. It is unabashedly virtuosic and full of memorable melodies.
- The Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor, op. 18, by Serge Rachmaninoff, is a dazzling work that is popular with performers and public alike. Its melodies have served as the basis of several popular songs.
- The Cello Concerto in B minor, op. 104, by Dvořák, is a brilliant showpiece that showcases the cello as a virtuoso instrument.

## Questions for Further Study

1. This is a good piece on which to practice your active listening skills. Do you find yourself getting more out of it after listening to it several times? Why or why not?
2. How would you interpret the expressive content of this piece? Does it present contrasting emotional states, either between movements or within them?

Is there an overall expressive contour like that found in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony?

3. Listen carefully to the rhythms of the last movement. Can you hear the changes of meter that occur at several points? Is there anything else surprising about the way rhythm and meter are articulated in this music?
4. The Adagio slow movement is often noted for its lyrical serenity. Apart from being slower in tempo, how does it differ from the other movements?
5. How would you describe the relationship between the solo violin and the orchestra? Does either dominate? Is their relationship cooperative or combative, or is it both at different times? Do you hear each as being an individual? Why or why not?
6. Would it help you listen to this music if Brahms had provided a written program describing what it is about? Do you find yourself trying to develop such a program, or does doing so get in the way of listening to the music?

# Aaron Copland, *Four Dance Episodes* From *Rodeo*

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) was one of the best-known American classical composers. Although he wrote music in a wide variety of styles, he is most remembered for works like the ballets *Billy the Kid, Rodeo* (pronounced with the accent on the first syllable), and *Appalachian Spring*, the *Fanfare for the Common Man*, and the *Lincoln Portrait*. These pieces draw on images, tunes, stories, and personalities with broad appeal, and they have become American classics. As we saw in Chapter 12, the *Fanfare* has been used on television, and the "Hoe-Down" movement from *Rodeo* has been as well. You may recognize them even if you could not identify them by name.

Copland wrote these pieces in the 1930s and 1940s, during the Great Depression and the Second World War. He meant to create a specifically American music, at a time when people felt in need of national unity. But what makes Copland's music American? Does it still speak to the more culturally diverse America of the 21st century? Let us listen to "Hoe-Down" and the other three movements of the familiar dance suite from *Rodeo*.

Links to an iTunes playlist of recommended recordings of this work are found on the book's companion website.

## The Setting

In 1942, American morale was badly in need of a boost. After 12 long years, the economy had still not recovered from the shockwave created by the stock market crash in 1929. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 jolted the country out of its complacency about international events. It took many months, though, before American troops and materiel were ready for overseas fighting. In the meantime, artists as well as politicians worked to strengthen national resolve.

Copland was commissioned to write *Rodeo* by a well-known dancer and choreographer, Agnes de Mille. She asked him to write a ballet about the American

West for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. The resulting work is similar to his *Billy the Kid* of four years earlier, but more optimistic. The story centers on a Cowgirl who longs to attract the attention of the Head Wrangler at the rodeo. She is unsuccessful until she dons a dress and acts in a more "feminine" manner. The work, first performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, was immediately successful. Copland later pared down and reorchestrated the four main scenes to create the *Four Dance Episodes*, which are heard much more frequently than the full ballet.

## The Genre

Ballet originated in France in the 17th century. However, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries it was largely associated with Russia, thanks to the contributions of Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, and dancers like Vaslav Nijinsky (1890–1950). Stravinsky was one of the most important early 20th-century composers, and the impresario Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929) commissioned several of his major works for his company, the Ballets Russes; they premiered in Paris in the 1910s and 1920s.

The first ballets were mostly performed during operas, and many operas still feature ballet scenes. In the 19th century, though, composers began writing full-scale dramatic works to be danced entirely in ballet. Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* is one example.

At the same time, the styles of classical ballet were being challenged by American dancers like Isadora Duncan (1878–1927) and Martha Graham (1894–1991). Their approach, known collectively as *modern dance*, emphasized bold physical movement and personal expression. Graham commissioned Copland's best-known work, *Appalachian Spring*.

Like Brahms, Copland drew on both classical and popular styles, and so did modern dance. The year after Agnes de Mille's triumph with *Rodeo* in 1942, she choreographed Rodgers and Hammerstein's legendary Broadway musical *Oklahoma!* It would have been almost inconceivable for a story about cowboys and the American frontier to be presented in the style of classical Russian ballet, but de Mille's style worked both on Broadway and in the more traditional world of classical music.

## How the Music Was Written

Copland was born in Brooklyn of Russian Jewish immigrant parents. His mother, however, had lived in the American West as a child, and Copland traveled widely and developed deeply populist political instincts. At the time he was writing *Rodeo*, he had recently discovered John and Alan Lomax's *Our Singing Country*, which transcribed a wide range of American folk music from field recordings, with the assistance of composer Ruth Crawford Seeger. Here Copland found the song *If He'd Be a Buckaroo by His Trade*, which he used in *Buckaroo Holiday*, the first movement of the *Rodeo* suite. "Buckaroo" is an English version of the Spanish *vaquero*, or cowboy.

The tune is introduced by the trombone just before the halfway point of the movement. Copland marked it "with humor" and placed long pauses

after the second and fourth phrases. This makes more sense if one looks at the text:

1. If he'd be a buckaroo by his trade,
I'd have him a hondoo ready-made, [pause]
And if he throws his turns on right
He can stretch my hondoo every night. [pause]

Chorus:
With his ring ting tinny,
And his ring ting hay,
With his ring ting tinny,
And his ring ting ho.

2. If he'd be a preacher by his trade,
I'd have him a pulpit ready-made,
And I'd hold fast to his snubbing post
While he goes at me with his Holy Ghost.

3. If he'd be a sheepherder by his trade,
I'd have him corrals all ready-made,
And when he goes to separate
Then he can use my dodging gate.

4. If he'd be a sailor by his trade
I'd have him a ship all ready made;
With him to row and me to steer
We'd bring a cargo once a year.

Copland also drew on *Our Singing Country* for the fiddle tune that serves as the basis of the famous "Hoe-Down." This tune was originally known as *Bonyparte's Retreat*, but many fiddle players now call it *Copland's Fancy*!

## Performance Tradition

Unlike the other works discussed in this chapter, the *Four Dance Movements from Rodeo* can be heard in a recording conducted by the composer himself. There is no question, therefore, about how Copland wanted this music to sound, because we can listen to his own performance.

However, the music still allows a range of approaches. For example, Copland marked the "Hoe-Down" Allegro, but he took it at a slower tempo than many other conductors. His good friend Leonard Bernstein played it much faster. So did Arthur Fiedler, who conducted the premiere of the *Four Dance Movements* with the Boston Pops.

None of these performances is definitive. Copland may be the composer, but Bernstein was a friend and closely identified with his music. Bernstein was even rumored to have written a piano solo from the original ballet (omitted from the *Four Dance Movements*) as a gift to his friend. However, others can interpret the music differently as well.

Bear in mind that Copland wrote this music for dancing. Although the ballet, with Agnes de Mille's choreography, is occasionally revived, most people hear

*Rodeo* today as an orchestral work. The same is true of *Billy the Kid* and *Appalachian Spring*. Even *The Nutcracker* is frequently heard as *The Nutcracker Suite*. When a conductor doesn't have to worry about whether dancers can keep up with him, he may feel freer to speed the music up and take other liberties with the tempo.

## Copland and the 20th Century

Copland is one of the most popular 20th-century composers. His last new works were written in 1973. Yet he continues to appeal to listeners who do not remember the Depression and may not even live in America. He has truly become a classical composer.

Copland is often considered more accessible than other major 20th-century composers like Stravinsky or Crumb. It would be a mistake, though, to say that he was not an innovator. The attempt to forge a *national* music represented a sharp break from the "universal" style of the classical canon: a break that many 19th-century composers (e.g. Dvořák and Smetana) had already anticipated, but that 20th-century composers tended to take even further. Copland faced the particularly difficult challenge of speaking to Americans in a genre—classical music—that was widely associated with Europe and its traditions. Copland's success is a testament to his innovation and his contemporary appeal.

## Changing Meanings

*Rodeo* has remained popular because it speaks deeply to America's sense of national identity. In many ways, though, the work is dated. The story may be seen as "politically incorrect." Should a woman sacrifice her own skills and personality in the attempt to find a man? The romantic image of cowboys and the frontier has also come in for serious re-examination. The music, too, is rooted in the folk idioms of white European culture. It ignores much of the American musical scene in Copland's own time. Elsewhere, he did show considerable familiarity with jazz and Latin American music.

How can this music still have such broad appeal? One reason is that it often sounds like it belongs in a movie score. This is no coincidence. Copland wrote extensively for the movies, including such classics as *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town*; he won an Oscar in 1949 for his score for *The Heiress*. Along with other classically trained composers, he helped to establish a connection between the movies and art music. We can hear that connection now in the music of film composers like John Williams, but we saw in Chapter 11 that many techniques essential to film music were actually pioneered by 19th-century opera composers.

Copland's music is not simply *about* cowboys; it evokes an association with cowboys. Television audiences can immediately perceive the connection with the roundup, cowboy culture, and wholesomely American attitudes. That helps explain why popular culture has continued to turn to *Rodeo*. The use of "Hoe-Down" on commercials for "Beef: It's What's for Dinner" has made this music instantly recognizable. This would not work with Crumb or Ives.

As we can see, the meaning of great music continues to change. Its meanings begin with the composer and the circumstances of its origin, but go beyond them as well. With Copland, we can perceive links between the traditions of classical music and 20th-century American culture. Most listeners are barely aware of

those links, but they are an important part of what makes this music "tick." Understanding them is crucial to being either an active listener or, in the final measure, an emotional listener. The more you know about this music, the more you will hear. And the more you hear, the better you will know it.

## *If You Liked This Music . . .*

### More by Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland's music is widely available, and much of it may sound familiar.

- *Appalachian Spring*, originally a ballet but often performed as an orchestral suite, is probably his best-known work. It features the Shaker melody *Simple Gifts*.
- The Clarinet Concerto features an intriguing blend of classical and jazz idioms.
- The Piano Variations are a stark, uncompromisingly modern work that highlights a different side of Copland.

## Questions for Further Study

1. Do you recognize any familiar tunes in Copland's music? Do any of the tunes sound familiar, even if you can't identify them? If so, why do you think this is the case?
2. In what ways does the music of "Buckaroo Holiday" suggest the fast-paced action of a rodeo?
3. Do any of the movements sound particularly cinematic? What kind of scene do you imagine them depicting, and why? Would this music be particularly appropriate to a Western?
4. Apart from the tunes, are there other elements of this music that strike you as particularly American? Describe them as specifically as you can.