

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)



FAST FACTS

- Studied piano in Manhattan, and music theory in Paris
- Influenced by European classical music and popular/jazz styles in New York
- Decided to write music that American people could relate to after the Depression hit (1929)
- Used Mexican and Western American folk songs in many of his pieces
- Taught Leonard Bernstein in Boston

Born: 1900 (Brooklyn, NY)
Died: 1992 (North Tarrytown, NY)

Aaron Copland was born to Jewish parents who emigrated from Lithuania to New York. His interest in music was sparked when he began learning how to play the piano from his sister. He later studied with a well-known piano teacher in Manhattan, who taught him some of the fundamentals of music theory. Copland absorbed as much knowledge of music as he could by attending performances at the New York Symphony and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Copland was also influenced by his exposure to ragtime and popular music while living in New York City. His early music contains many jazz and popular music elements, such as dissonant intervals (groups of notes that sound harsh to the listener). He even studied with a very famous French music-theorist, Nadia Boulanger, in Paris.

When the Great Depression hit America in 1929, however, Copland felt strongly about writing music that the American people could understand more easily than modern classical music, which can sound complicated and stressful sometimes. Copland set out to combine his extensive music theory and composing knowledge with simpler musical ideas. He often used Mexican and Western American folk tunes to give his audience a sense of identity and belonging when they listened to his music. Some of these pieces include *El Salon Mexico*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*. These works feature lively rhythms, recognizable folk songs, and harmonies that replicate a painting of the American frontier.

Near the end of his life, Copland was devoted to sharing his knowledge with young musicians and composers. He taught at Tanglewood and Harvard in Boston, and the New School for Social Research in New York City. Some of his students included Leonard Bernstein, famous for the musical *West Side Story*, and Elliott Carter, an important composer of contemporary music.



Let's Listen!

- DePauw University performs part of *Appalachian Spring*, one of Copland's most well-known works: [click here](#).
- Learn more about Aaron Copland and his classic American sound: [click here](#).
- Listen to Copland's famous piece, *Fanfare for the Common Man*: [click here](#). Where have you heard this tune before?