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# COPLAND PIANO MUSIC—ROMANTIC & MODERN

Including World Premiere Recording of Sonata in G Major (1920-21)



RAMON SALVATORE, PIANO

**COPLAND PIANO MUSIC—ROMANTIC & MODERN**

- 1-3** Sonata in G Major (1921) (22:00)\*
- 1** I. Allegro maestoso (11:00)
  - 2** II. Andante Cantabile (6:00)
  - 3** III. Allegro Vivace (5:00)
- 4** Sonnet II (1919) (1:05)
- 5** Three Moods (1921) (4:30)
- 6** Scherzo Humoristique: The Cat and the Mouse (1920) (3:30)
- 7** Passacaglia (1922) (6:00)
- 8** Down A Country Lane (1962) (2:00)
- 9** Midsummer Nocturne (1947) (2:00)
- 10** Proclamation (1973) (2:00)
- 11** Midday Thoughts (1982) (2:00)
- 12-17** Piano Fantasy (1957) (29:20)
- 12** I. Slow—
  - 13** II. Rubato—
  - 14** III. Somewhat faster—
  - 15** IV. Quite fast and rhythmic—
  - 16** V. Suddenly fast—
  - 17** VI. As at first

Ramon Salvatore, piano    \*World Premiere Recording    TT: (75:30)

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## Aaron Copland Piano Music

Notes by Phillip Ramey

### Sonata in G Major

Although the French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger was by far Aaron Copland's most important and influential teacher, his early private studies (1917-21) in harmony, counterpoint and composition with Rubin Goldmark in New York were also crucial. Goldmark was the nephew of Karl Goldmark, composer of the then-popular opera *The Queen of Sheba*, and had studied with Antonin Dvorák. Copland remembered that Rubin Goldmark "had an excellent grasp of the fundamentals of music and knew very well how to impart his ideas." As a result, the young man was spared "the floundering that so many American musicians have suffered through incompetent teaching at the start of their training."

The bulk of Copland's juvenilia consists of brief piano pieces and songs. "During these formative years," he wrote, "I had been gradually uncovering for myself the literature of music. Some instinct seems to lead me logically from Chopin's waltzes to Haydn's sonatinas to Beethoven's sonatas to Wagner's operas. And from there it was but a step to Hugo Wolf's songs, to Debussy's preludes, and to Scriabin's piano poems... As far as I can remember no one ever told me about modern music." Certainly, the arch-conservative Goldmark never did, except to denigrate it, and that, Copland recalled, "was enough to whet any young man's appetite. The fact that [modern] music was in some sense forbidden only increased its attractiveness."

As a kind of graduation exercise, Goldmark insisted that Copland compose a sonata. "In his mind the sonata form was the pinnacle of our work together... He considered especially the first-movement sonata-allegro form the key to all future composition, and would not allow me to leave town without it!" The result was Copland's most ambitious early score, the *Sonata in G Major for Piano*, written from 1920 to June 1921. (A note on the manuscript reads: "Composed for Rubin Goldmark as final student work"; only a few days after he finished it, Copland left for France for further studies.)

Whatever interest attaches to this unpublished three-movement piece must be chiefly historical. The *G Major Sonata* is so derivative — of Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn — that it gives

no indication at all of any personal style. But it does demonstrate a familiarity with and mastery of traditional form and harmony that is impressive.

I remember that once, when examining the manuscript with Copland as he played through parts of it, he termed the music “completely conventional — something I had to come up with to make Rubin Goldmark happy. It was written in absolute conformity to the ‘rules’.” He told me it had never been performed publicly, and when I asked if he would allow such a performance, he said no. Still, it was clear to me that he was uninterested in rather than ashamed of his early exercise. A few years after his death, Copland’s executors decided to make the work available. Ramon Salvatore gave the world premiere of the *Sonata in G Major* on May 21, 1995, at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Salvatore has written about the work as follows:

When I first had the opportunity to examine the manuscript of the *Sonata in G Major* at the Library of Congress, I was struck by the care Copland evidently gave the work. It appeared to be a thoroughly well-made piece, with much attention given to detail. The Sonata is in a consistent German-romantic style and contains all the trappings of that genre: rich harmonies, thick sonorities, long singing lines, arpeggiated basses, big climaxes — in short, all the elements that attract pianists, and audiences to this kind of music.

The Sonata is logically developed, concise, and straightforward. The first movement (*Allegro maestoso*), in G major, is in traditional sonata form, with each theme and idea clearly audible. The second movement (*Andante cantabile*), in D-flat major and A-B-A form, achieves an expansive climax in the coda. The last movement (*Allegro Vivace*), in G minor, is in rondo form with the first and second themes effectively combined in the development. It ends with a truly virtuosic drive.

While it is of undoubted historical interest, I believe this extravagantly romantic Sonata has sufficient intrinsic merit to become a genuine audience-pleaser like Charles Ives’ similarly backward-looking First Symphony (which Ives wrote as a student of conservative composer Horatio Parker). I invite the listener to decide.

## Sonnet II

The score of the unpublished *Sonnet II* is dated April 10, 1919. At the head of the music is the dedication, “to A.V.” (Arne Vainio, Copland told me, was a young, intelligent, handsome Finnish cellist-friend with whom he played duos and for whom he wrote two cello-and-piano pieces, *Poème* and *Lament*, during 1918-19), along with a line from a poem by Conrad Aiken: “Music I heard with you was more than music, and bread I broke with you was more than bread.”

This twenty-seven-bar miniature was conceived as the second of a set of three sonnets, composed from 1918 to 1920 (No. 3, with an inscription from Carl Sandburg, is again dedicated to Vainio). The sonorous, Scriabinesque piece is decidedly effective — by turns brooding, agitated and fanciful, and, near the end, eruptive (marked “big cres.” [sic]). Bennett Lerner gave the first known performance of *Sonnet II* in October 1985, in New York.

### **Three Moods**

Published in 1982, more than half a century after they were composed, the charmingly eclectic *Three Moods* originally bore the French title *Trois Esquisses* (three sketches). The first two pieces (the Slavic-tinged *Embittered* and the mellow, meditative *Wistful*) were written in New York in, respectively, November 1920 and January 1921, before Copland departed for France. The third *Mood* dates from July 1921, composed in Paris: in it, jazz appears for the first time in Copland’s music, and the middle part appropriates a phrase from the popular World War I-era song “My Buddy.” The composer himself premiered the *Moods* at the Fontainebleau graduation concert, at the Salle Gaveau, Paris, on September 23, 1921, where he anticipated that No. 3 “ought to make the old professors sit up and take notice.” (The following month he began to work with Nadia Boulanger, in Paris and at Fontainebleau.) I gave the first modern performance of No. 1 in November 1980 in New York, from the manuscript, in the composer’s presence at an all-Copland concert; Leo Smit reintroduced the entire set the next year, in Albany, New York.

### **Scherzo Humoristique: The Cat and the Mouse**

Written in Brooklyn in March 1920, Copland’s *Scherzo Humoristique: The Cat and the Mouse* was inspired by the La Fontaine poem “*Le Chat et la souris*.” Although Copland stated in his autobiography that he had never shown *The Cat and the Mouse* to Goldmark, he once told me that in fact he had, and that he and

his teacher came to a parting of the ways over the “modernism” of this witty little piece, with its erratic rhythms and French Impressionist veneer. (In Copland’s 1941 article, “Composer from Brooklyn,” there is an account of Goldmark’s reaction to *The Cat and the Mouse*: “He regretfully admitted that he had no criteria by which to judge such music.”)

Copland gave the first performance of *The Cat and the Mouse* at the Salle Gaveau, Paris, on September 23, 1921, at the same concert in which he introduced the *Three Moods*. Seated in the audience was the French publisher Jacques Durand. He found himself so taken by the *Scherzo Humoristique* that he visited Copland backstage and offered him a contract for the score, which would subsequently become the composer's first published work. In breaking the exciting news to his parents, Copland wrote: “Let me try to calmly explain to you what this means. In the first place Durand & Son is the biggest music publishing firm in Paris, which means the world. To finally see my music printed means more to me than any debut in Carnegie Hall ever could... I received a long letter from Mr. Goldmark. What would he have to say to all this!”

### **Passacaglia**

Copland's *Passacaglia* was written in Paris from December 1921 to January 1922. Serious, abstract and carefully articulated, it is a brief work displaying a formal rigor that was undoubtedly a response to Boulanger’s insistence on control and clarity in the manipulation of musical materials. The *Passacaglia* is, for Copland, an unusually contrapuntal score, comprising a portentous eight-bar theme followed by eight variations that climax in a powerful and virtuosic manner. Despite a somewhat eclectic style betraying few hints of the mature Copland, the *Passacaglia* stands as a viable concert work rather than a mere academic exercise. The French pianist Daniel Ericourt gave the first performance, in Paris at the Société Musicale Indépendante, in January 1923. Copland later wrote that, perhaps because of “as emphasis on architectural structure,” the *Passacaglia* “appeared cold to some critics when it was first heard, but Mademoiselle [Boulanger] recognized the underlying emotion in it right away.”

### **Down a Country Lane**

A headline in the June 29, 1962 issue of *Life* magazine heralded “The Premiere of a Noted Composer’s Piece for Youngsters.” The composer was Aaron Copland, the piece *Down a Country Lane*, and the score, which had been commissioned by the magazine, ran

across two pages. In a related article, Copland explained that the music “is descriptive only in an imaginative, not a literal sense. I didn't think up the title until the piece was finished — *Down a Country Lane* just happened to fit its flowing quality.”

This is one of Copland's most satisfying miniatures, its character sweetly pastoral. The circumstances of the first performance are unknown.

### **Midsummer Nocturne**

One day in 1977, while I was, as Copland put it, “rummaging among [his] affairs,” I discovered in his files a neatly ink-copied, two-page piano piece that he had quite forgotten. Cast in his best lyric manner, this exquisite bagatelle was the only complete component of a suite of simple pieces, perhaps intended for children. The manuscript, from 1947, had no title, although a dozen tentative ones were penciled in at the top of the first page, among them *Pas de Trois*, *The Twilight Garden*, *Wordless Song*, and *Midsummer Nocturne*. Copland immediately chose the latter, and sent the music to his publisher. Meanwhile, he permitted me to give a copy of the manuscript to pianist Leo Smit, a longtime champion of his works, and Smit premiered *Midsummer Nocturne* in Cleveland, on January 13, 1978.

### **Proclamation Midday Thoughts**

Copland's final works in any genre, the piano pieces *Proclamation* and *Midday Thoughts*, were completed in November 1982, at my urging. By then, Copland, suffering from symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease, was incapable of any sustained or original composition, so that both brief works are based on earlier material.

A 1973 sketch, with the working title *Improvisation*, was the basis for *Proclamation*. In the early 1980s, this intriguing sketch, for what had been intended to be a large-scale piano work but which consisted of only thirty-five bars, would appear from time to time on the music-stand of Copland's piano, for he enjoyed playing it. When *Proclamation* was published, Copland described it in a note in the score as a “rather stern-sounding piece in what has not inappropriately been termed my ‘laying-down-the-law’ style.”

Sketches for the slow movement of a never-written *Ballade* for piano and orchestra, dating from early 1944, when Copland was completing his classic ballet *Appalachian Spring*, were the basis of *Midday Thoughts*. The fact that Copland used the melody in the

middle 1950s in an abandoned work for violin and orchestra shows that he had a lingering affection for it. The winsome tune found its final resting place in *Midday Thoughts*, which the composer characterized as a “brief lyric piece very much in the manner of *Appalachian Spring*.”

Both *Proclamation* and *Midday Thoughts* were premiered by Bennett Lerner, on February 28, 1983, at Carnegie Recital Hall, New York.

### **Piano Fantasy**

Of Copland’s major keyboard works, the *Piano Fantasy* is the most ambitious, outranking in that regard the *Piano Variations* and the (1939-41) *Piano Sonata*. The *Fantasy* was begun in 1955 and finished in 1957, based on concerto sketches from the early 1950s. The intended soloist was the renowned young American pianist William Kapell: when the commission with the Louisville Orchestra fell through, Copland wrote to a friend: “Perhaps I will do a big piece for piano alone. I have material for it that tempts me — a kind of Fantasy or something.” Kapell had performed both the *Variations* and *Sonata*, and Copland told me that he remembered him as being “a deeply satisfying pianist” who seemed to have “a natural rapport with my music, especially the rhythms.” On October 29, 1953, Kapell died in an airplane crash. “If Kapell had lived longer,” said Copland, “I certainly would have written a large piano work for him. As it happened, the best I could do was to dedicate my *Piano Fantasy* to his memory.”

In a 1957 newspaper article, Copland expressed his aims regarding the new piece. “My idea was to attempt a composition that would suggest the quality of fantasy, that is, a spontaneous and unpremeditated sequence of ‘events’ that would carry the listener irresistibly (if possible) from first note to last, while at the same time exemplifying clear if somewhat unconventional structural principles.”

Influenced by twelve-tone technique but fundamentally tonal, the *Fantasy* stands as Copland’s most complex and virtuosic piano work. He noted that “the musical framework of the entire [piece] derives from a sequence of ten different tones of the chromatic scale. To these are subsequently joined the two unused tones of the scale, treated throughout as a kind of cadential interval.” Although the *Fantasy* is played without pause, its carefully delineated sections suggest a three-movement formal layout, with the opening theme engendering each part. The *Fantasy*’s elaborate architecture,



dramatic rhetoric, granitic, sonorous expression and ultra-serious but far from austere tone might suggest comparison with certain of the late Beethoven sonatas — although its sometimes quirky rhythms are pure Copland.

Ramon Salvatore has written a useful analytic description of the *Fantasy*, which follows:

I. Slow (“first movement”)

- a) dramatic statement of theme (row) in single notes
- b) *fortissimo* chords marked “clangorous,”  
restatement of the basic set
- c) development of “a” and “b”

II. Rubato

- a) marked “restless, hesitant”
- b) transition, two-part writing based on  
transformation of opening theme

III. Somewhat faster (“Rubato e sostenuto”)

- a) melody moving by step; polymeters, leading to
- b) Much slower: climax, loud chords reminiscent of  
part Ib; gradual diminuendo leading to
- c) Moderate tempo, a transition marked “delicato,  
uncertain,” an increase in rhythmic activity leads to

IV. Quite fast and rhythmic (“second movement”)

- a) long and scherzando section marked “Light and  
playful,” in a two-part texture with changing and  
asymmetrical meters
- b) digression framed by silence, marked “Twice as  
slow, with humor”
- c) return to scherzando marked “muttering,”  
increase of motion and intensity leads to
- d) the climax: two *fff* chords, gradual diminuendo  
followed by a long silence;
- e) transition: the “b” material of I leading to

V. Suddenly fast

- a) new material: major and minor seconds or their  
octave displacements, skips of ninths
- b) climactic section: two *fff* chords (a more  
complex version of the one heard in IVd)
- c) more rapid 6/8 material leading to an even greater  
climax on a D-flat, then C pedal with rapid scales  
and glissandi in the right hand, two Grand Pauses

VI. As at first (“third movement”)

- a) *Forte* chords as in I
- b) “Slowly with atmosphere,” rising ninths as in V
- c) slow section with reference to quiescent section of IIIb, then “gradually more assertive” leading to
- d) modified restatement of Ib marked “*con tutta forza*”
- e) quiet expressive statement of the theme over E-major chord in bass (tonality of the *Fantasy*)
- f) ending quietly marked “Very slow and expressive” as in Vb, two E-major chords and final chord, very soft, marked: “*da lontano morendo*”

William Masselos introduced Copland’s *Piano Fantasy* on October 25, 1957, at New York’s Julliard School of Music, which had commissioned the work to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. The unusual concert was devoted entirely to the *Fantasy*, performed both before and after the intermission.

*Composer Phillip Ramey was a close friend and associate of Aaron Copland from 1967 until Copland’s death in 1990. Over that period, he published numerous carefully verified interviews with Copland, many of which appeared as sleeve-notes for Columbia Records’ “Copland Conducts Copland” series. Mr. Ramey is the dedicatee of the piano pieces Midsummer Nocturne and Proclamation, and, at Copland’s request, he made an orchestral version of Proclamation, which was premiered simultaneously by Zubin Mehta with the New York Philharmonic and Erich Leinsdorf with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, on November 14, 1985, the composer’s eighty-fifth birthday. From 1977 to 1993, Mr. Ramey was annotator and program editor of the New York Philharmonic.*

### ***About Ramon Salvatore***

Described by the *Chicago Tribune* as “one of Chicago’s most important musical ambassadors,” and hailed by *The New York Times* for his “bravura performances” and “splendid audacity” in programming, Ramon Salvatore commands national attention as a pianist who combines rhythmic panache and warm lyric cogency with a pioneering spirit. Praised for his poetic standard repertory performances, he has also won acclaim as a musical trailblazer, exploring still-undiscovered American terrain: the virtuoso piano music of our nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A recipient of a major grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1990, Mr. Salvatore presented a three-concert series titled “American Piano Music in the Grand Tradition” at New York’s Weill Recital Hall and repeated at the Chicago Cultural Center. In that series, Salvatore uncovered over 120 years of masterly keyboard works that reflected international traditions, yet spoke with a distinctively American voice. Included were such diverse composers as Amy Beach, Paul Bowles, Aaron Copland, John Corigliano, Arthur Foote, John LaMontaine, Hunter Johnson, Robert Palmer, Phillip Ramey, and Wallingford Riegger. Most of the music from that landmark series has been recorded and enthusiastically reviewed on the Cedille and Premier labels. Mr. Salvatore has also presented recitals at the National Gallery in Washington, New York’s Merkin Hall, Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, the Dame Myra Hess Series in Chicago and Los Angeles, and Detroit’s Cranbrook Series, and has concertized widely abroad, giving recitals in Spain, Morocco, Scotland, and England, including concerts in London’s Wigmore Hall and Purcell Room.

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