



NATIONAL FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA
APPALACHIAN SPRING

DAVID ALAN MILLER, conductor
SATURDAY, JUNE 13, 2015 . 8PM
ELSIE & MARVIN DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL

PROGRAM

Michael Torke

Bright Blue Music

Aaron Copland

Appalachian Spring (Suite from the Ballet)

- *intermission* -

John Corigliano

Symphony No. 1

Apologue: Of Rage and Remembrance

Tarantella

Chaconne: Giulio's Song

Epilogue

Bright Blue Music

MICHAEL TORKE

Born September 22, 1961, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Now living in Las Vegas, Nevada

This work was composed in 1985, under a commission from the New York Youth Symphony, which gave the premiere at Carnegie Hall on November 23 of that year, with David Alan Miller conducting. The score calls for 2 piccolos, 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, xylophone, brake drums, tam-tam, vibraphone, claves, wood block, triangle, glockenspiel, cymbals, suspended cymbal, bongo, tubular bells, tambourine, maraca, piano, harp and strings. Duration, 9 minutes.

Michael Torke was only 24 when this work was introduced. It was one of a number of early pieces relating to specific colors, and was included on an Argo CD of his “Color Music” performed by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under David Zinman, its companion pieces being *Green, Purple, Ecstatic Orange* and *Ash*. In the nearly 30 years since this work’s premiere, Mr. Torke has been active in various genres and many different locales. His orchestra piece *Javelin* was part of the music for the 1996 Olympics. Two years later he was composer-in-residence for the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, which he provided with a percussion concerto and the tone poem *An American Abroad*. In 2003 he established his own record label, Ecstatic Records, which in addition to new recordings reissued the landmark Zinman collection. The Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, commissioned his opera *Pop-pea*, and introduced it in 2012. The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic commissioned his Concerto for Orchestra, and recorded it in 2014. David Alan Miller, who conducted the premiere of the present work and is on the podium for this evening’s concert, has remained a steadfast champion of Torke’s music, commissioning, performing and recording new works with his Albany Symphony Orchestra (the cello concerto *Winter’s Tale* was given its premiere last December, with Julie Albers as soloist; a piano concerto will be introduced soon), and the Milwaukee Ballet, in the composer’s home town, has commissioned two new works.

When *Bright Blue Music* had its premiere, in 1985, Torke wrote that he had been inspired by ideas put forward by the respected Austrian/British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) “that meaning is not in words themselves, but in the grammar of words used: I conceived of a parallel in musical terms. Harmonies in themselves do not contain any meaning; rather, musical meaning results only in the way harmonies are used. Harmonic language is then, in a sense, inconsequential. If the choice of harmony is arbitrary, why not then use tonic and dominant chords — the simplest and most direct, and, for me, the most pleasurable? Once this decision was made and put in the back of my mind, an unexpected freedom of expression followed. With the simplest means, my musical emotions and impulses were free to guide me. The feeling of working was exuberant; I would leave my outdoor studio, and the trees and bushes seemed to dance, and the sky seemed bright blue.

“That bright-blue color contributed toward the piece’s title, but in conjunction with another personal association. The key of the piece, D major (from which there is no true modulation), has been the color for me since I was five years old.”

Philip Kennicott, in his annotation for the Zinman recording, back in 1990, expanded on the composer’s own remarks regarding Wittgenstein, who, “it will be remembered, also argued against the possibility of private languages, and that at first seems to be what Torke is after in his music. Take what you care about, leave the rest. If I like these particular harmonies, I will use them within my own private grammar. . . . Despite this, there is nothing solipsistic about Torke’s composition, and there is no self-indulgence either. The music is public, appealing and popular. Repetition, rhythmic propulsion and bright clear harmonies may be private pleasures for Torke, but they are also public pleasures for his audience. *Bright Blue Music* and *Ash* seem at first to be displaced from the development section or coda of a classical symphony, to be fragmented views of the earliest quintessentially public music. The writing is free and exuberant . . . ; it is the sound of a composer reveling in his own rearrangement of familiar materials, oblivious to time-worn arguments.”

Appalachian Spring (Suite from the Ballet)

AARON COPLAND

Born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, New York

Died December 2, 1990, North Tarrytown, New York

Copland composed his music for the ballet Appalachian Spring under a commission from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in 1944; the work was given its first performance on October 30 of that year at the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress, in Washington, with choreography by Martha Graham, who also danced the leading role. The concert suite, arranged by the composer shortly after the ballet’s premiere, was introduced by the New York Philharmonic under Artur Rodzinski on October 4, 1945, and won both the Pulitzer Prize in Music and the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award for that year.

The score calls for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, long drum, glockenspiel, triangle, wood block, xylophone, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, harp, piano and strings. Duration, 25 minutes.

Appalachian Spring was the culmination of Copland’s series of “Americana” in dance, having been preceded by *Billy the Kid*, with choreography by Eugene Loring (1938), and *Rodeo*, for Agnes de Mille (1942). In *Appalachian Spring* the composer struck a deeper, more poignant note than in the two “Westerns”; here the music is illumined by an inner glow of greater warmth than perhaps any of his earlier works. Copland himself noted that “the music of the ballet takes as its point of departure the personality of Martha Graham,” and his score bears the affectionate subtitle “Ballet for Martha,” which had been the working title until Graham herself found the felicitous phrase “Appalachian spring” in a poem by Hart Crane. The scenario, created well before she and Copland began their collaborative effort, was summarized by Edwin Denby (Copland’s librettist for the 1937 high school opera *The Second Hurricane*), reporting the New York premiere in the *Herald Tribune* of May 15, 1945, as “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 neighbor 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.”

Having effectively used Western tunes in his earlier ballets *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*, Copland introduced in this score a hymn-like Shaker song, or spiritual, that was to prove extraordinarily effective in creating precisely the atmosphere of simple wonder, humility and faith that is the essence of this work. The song, composed in or about 1875 by Elder Joseph Brackett (1797–1882), who is said to have sung and danced it himself “with his coat tails flying,” is called “Simple Gifts”:

’Tis the gift to be simple, ’tis the
gift to be free;

’Tis the gift to come down where
we ought to be;

And when we find ourselves in the
place just right,

’Twill be in the valley of love and
delight.

When true simplicity is gain’d,
To bow and to bend we sha’n’t be
asham’d

To turn, turn will be our delight,
’Til by turning, turning we come
round right.

(In 1950 Copland made a vocal setting of “Simple Gifts” as part of his first set of *Old American Songs*; this setting, for baritone and piano, was subsequently orchestrated and also arranged for chorus. Eventually the composer arranged his original use of it in the ballet as a freestanding orchestral piece called *Shaker Variations*. The tune bears more than a passing resemblance to the Hungarian folk song quoted in the concluding section of Bartók’s *Rhapsody No. 1* for violin, composed in 1928.)

The original ballet score called for only 13 instruments (flute, clarinet, bassoon, piano and strings), in keeping with the restricted dimensions of the pit in the Coolidge Auditorium. The music has become far more widely known in the suite for full orchestra, which omits only about eight minutes of the ballet score. (Copland orchestrated the remainder

of the material in the late 1960s.) The suite’s eight sections, played without pause, were described as follows by the composer in his note for the 1945 premiere:

1. VERY SLOWLY. Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light.
2. FAST. Sudden burst of unison strings in A major arpeggios starts the action. A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene.
3. MODERATE. Duo for the Bride and her Intended — scene of tenderness and passion.
4. QUITE FAST. The Revivalist and his flock. Folksy feelings — suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.
5. STILL FASTER. Solo dance of the Bride — presentiment of motherhood. Extremes of joy and fear and wonder.
6. VERY SLOWLY (as at first). Transition scenes reminiscent of the introduction.
7. CALM AND FLOWING. Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her farmer-husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme ... sung by a solo clarinet ...
8. MODERATE. CODA. The Bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left “quiet and strong in their new house.” Muted strings intone a hushed, prayerlike passage. The close is reminiscent of the opening music.

Symphony No. 1 JOHN CORIGLIANO

*Born February 16, 1938, New York City
Now living there*

John Corigliano was the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s composer-in-residence when that orchestra commissioned this work for its centenary; he composed it in 1988–89, and it was given its premiere performances (and recorded for Erato) in Chicago on March 15, 16 and 17, 1990, under Daniel Barenboim.

The score, dedicated to the memory of Sheldon Shkolnik, calls for 3 piccolos, 3 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 5 trumpets, 4 trombones, 2 tubas, timpani, field drum, snare drum, tenor drum, 2 bass drums, roto-toms,

suspended cymbal, finger cymbals, temple blocks, triangle, tambourine, crotales, glockenspiel, whip, ratchet, flexatone, metal plate, tam-tam, brake drum, xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, chimes, anvil, police whistle, mandolin, onstage piano, offstage piano, harp and strings. Duration, 40 minutes.

Many of John Corigliano’s most significant works are “about” something — opera, film score, music for the theater, song-cycles, descriptive or “programmatic” concertos and other instrumental pieces. The First Symphony is very definitely in this category, as indicated not only in the headings of the respective movements but in the dedication as well. The pianist Sheldon Shkolnik and Mr. Corigliano were lifelong friends and frequent collaborators. In February 1969 Shkolnik was the soloist, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Irwin Hoffman, in the first performance of Corigliano’s Piano Concerto after that work’s San Antonio premiere the previous year, and the Symphony was not the only work the composer dedicated to him. This particular dedication, though, took a tragic twist, if not an entirely unforeseen one. Shortly before the Symphony’s premiere Corigliano asked Shkolnik, who is actually described in the work’s opening movement, for permission to dedicate the score to him, and Shkolnik, delighted by the gesture, was present at all three Chicago performances in the middle of March 1990. Barely a week later, though, the pianist was dead, and in the published score the dedication takes a memorial form. Shkolnik was one of the victims of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, and his death so soon after the Symphony’s premiere was a poignant reminder of what this music is about: the devastating disease known by the acronym AIDS.

The musical community had sustained perhaps more than its share of losses to this plague, and Corigliano was impelled to produce an expression of concern, of something more than lamentation or empty protest, focusing on the thousands of victims through the prism of those closest to him, as he explains in a detailed note of his own.

Historically, many symphonists (Berlioz, Mahler and Shostakovich, to name a few) have been inspired by important events in their lives, and perhaps occasionally their choice of the symphonic form was dictated by extra-musical events. In the decade preceding the composition of my own First Symphony I lost many friends and colleagues to the AIDS epidemic, and the cumulative effect of those losses, naturally, affected me deeply. My First Symphony was generated by feelings of loss, anger and frustration.

A few years before I undertook this work, I was extremely moved when I first saw “The Quilt,” an ambitious interweaving of several thousand fabric panels, each memorializing a person who had died of AIDS, and, most importantly, each designed and constructed by his or her loved ones. This made me want to memorialize in music those I had lost, and reflect on those I was losing. I decided to relate the first three movements of the Symphony to three lifelong musician friends. In the third movement, still other friends are recalled in a quilt-like interweaving of motivic melodies.

Cast in free, large-scale A-B-A form, the first movement (APOLOGUE: OF RAGE AND REMEMBRANCE — the term *Apologue* defined as “an allegorical narrative usually intended to convey a moral”) is highly charged and alternates between the tension of anger and the bittersweet nostalgia of remembering. It reflects my distress over a concert pianist friend. The opening (marked “Ferocious”) begins with the nasal open A of the violins and violas. This note, which starts and finishes the Symphony, grows in intensity and volume until it is answered by a burst of percussion. A repeat of this angry-sounding note climaxes, this time, in the entrance of the full orchestra, which is accompanied by a slow timpani beat. This steady pulse — a kind of musical heartbeat — is utilized in this movement as the start of a series of overlapping accelerandos interspersed with antagonistic chatterings of antiphonal brass. A final multiple acceleration reaches a peak climaxed by the violins in their highest register, which begins the middle section.

As the violins make a gradual *diminuendo*, a distant (offstage) piano is heard, as if in a memory, playing Leopold Godowsky’s transcription of Isaac Albéniz’s Tango (made in Chicago in 1921), a favorite of my pianist

friend. This is the start of an extended lyrical section in which nostalgic themes are mixed with fragmented suggestions of the Tango. Little by little, the chattering brass motives begin to reappear, interrupted by the elements of tension that initiated the work, until the lyrical “remembrance” theme is accompanied by the relentless pulsing timpani heartbeat. At this point, the lyrical theme continues in its slow and even rhythm, but the drumbeat begins simultaneously to accelerate. The tension of a slow, steady melody played against a slow, steady accelerando culminates in a recapitulation of the multiple accelerations heard earlier in the movement, starting the final section.

But this time the accelerations reach an even bigger climax, in which the entire orchestra joins together playing a single dissonant chord in a near-hysterical repeated pattern that begins to slow down and finally stops. Unexpectedly, the volume of this passage remains loud, so that the effect is that of a monstrous machine coming to a halt but still boiling with energy. This energy, however, is finally exhausted, and there is a *diminuendo* to piano. A recapitulation of the original motives along with a final burst of intensity from the orchestra and offstage piano concludes this movement, which ends on a desolate high A.

The second movement (TARANTELLA) was written in memory of a friend who was an executive in the music industry. He was also an amateur pianist; in 1970 I wrote a set of dances (*Gazebo Dances* for piano, four hands) for various friends to play, and dedicated the final movement, a tarantella, to him. This was a jaunty little piece whose mood, as in many tarantellas, seems to be at odds with its purpose. For the tarantella, as described in *Grove’s Dictionary*, is a “South Italian dance played at continually increasing speed [and] by means of dancing it a strange kind of insanity [attributed to tarantula bite] could be cured.” The association of madness and my piano piece proved both prophetic and bitterly ironic when my friend, whose wit and intelligence were legendary in the music field, became insane as a result of AIDS dementia.

In writing a tarantella movement for this symphony, I tried to picture some of the schizophrenic and hallucinatory images that would have accompanied that madness,

as well as the moments of lucidity. This movement is formally less organized than the preceding one, and intentionally so — but there is a slow and relentless progression toward an accelerated “madness.” The ending can only be described as a brutal scream.

The third movement (CHACONNE: GIULIO’S SONG) recalls a friendship that dated back to my college days. Giulio was an amateur cellist, full of that enthusiasm for music that amateurs seem to have and professionals try to keep. After he died several years ago, I found an old tape recording of the two of us improvising on cello and piano, as we often did. That tape, dated 1962, provided material for the extended cello solo in this movement. Notating Giulio’s improvisation, I found a pungent and beautiful motto which, when developed, formed the melody played by the solo cello at this point. . . . That theme is preceded by a chaconne, based on twelve tones (and the chords they produce), which runs through the entire movement. The first several minutes of this movement are played by the violas, cellos and double basses alone. The chaconne chords are immediately heard, hazily dissolving into each other, and the cello melody begins over the final chord. Halfway through this melody a second cello joins the soloist. This is the first of a series of musical remembrances of other friends (the first [of them] having been a professional cellist who was Giulio’s teacher and who also died of AIDS).

In order to provide themes for the interweaving of lost friends, I asked William M. Hoffman, the librettist of my opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*, to eulogize them with short sentences. I then set those lines for various solo instruments and, removing the text, inserted them into the symphony. These melodies are played against the recurring background of the chaconne, interspersed with dialogues between the solo cellos. At the conclusion of the section, as the cello recapitulates Giulio’s theme, the solo trumpet begins to play the note A that began the symphony. This is taken up by the other brass, one by one, so that the note grows to overpower the other orchestral sonorities. The entire string section takes up the A and builds to a restatement of the initial assertive orchestral entrance in the first movement. The relentless drumbeat returns, but this time it does not accelerate. Instead, it continues its slow

and somber beat against the chaconne, augmented by two sets of antiphonal chimes tolling the twelve pitches as the intensity increases and the persistent rhythm is revealed to be that of a funeral march.

Finally the march rhythm starts to dissolve, as individual choirs and solo instruments accelerate independently, until the entire orchestra climaxes with a sonic explosion. After this, only a solo cello remains, softly playing the A that opened the work, and introducing the final part (EPILOGUE).

This entire section is played against a repeated pattern consisting of waves of brass chords. To me, the sound of ocean waves conveys an image of timelessness. I wanted to suggest that in this symphony, by creating sonic “waves,” to which purpose I partially encircled the orchestra with an expanded brass section. Behind the orchestra five trumpets are placed with the first trumpet in the center; fanning outwards around the orchestra are six horns (three on each side), four trombones (two on each side), and finally one tuba on each end of the semicircle of brass. The waves begin with a high note in the solo trumpet and then move upward and around the orchestra so that the descending brass notes form chords. A slowly moving pattern of four chords is thus built; this repeated pattern creates sonic waves throughout the Epilogue.

Against these waves, when they begin, the piano solo from the first movement (the Albéniz/Godowsky Tango) returns, as does the tarantella melody (this time sounding distant and peaceful), and the two solo cellos, interwoven between, recapitulate their dialogue. A slow *diminuendo* leaves the solo cello holding the same perpetual A until it finally fades away.”

JOHN CORIGLIANO

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