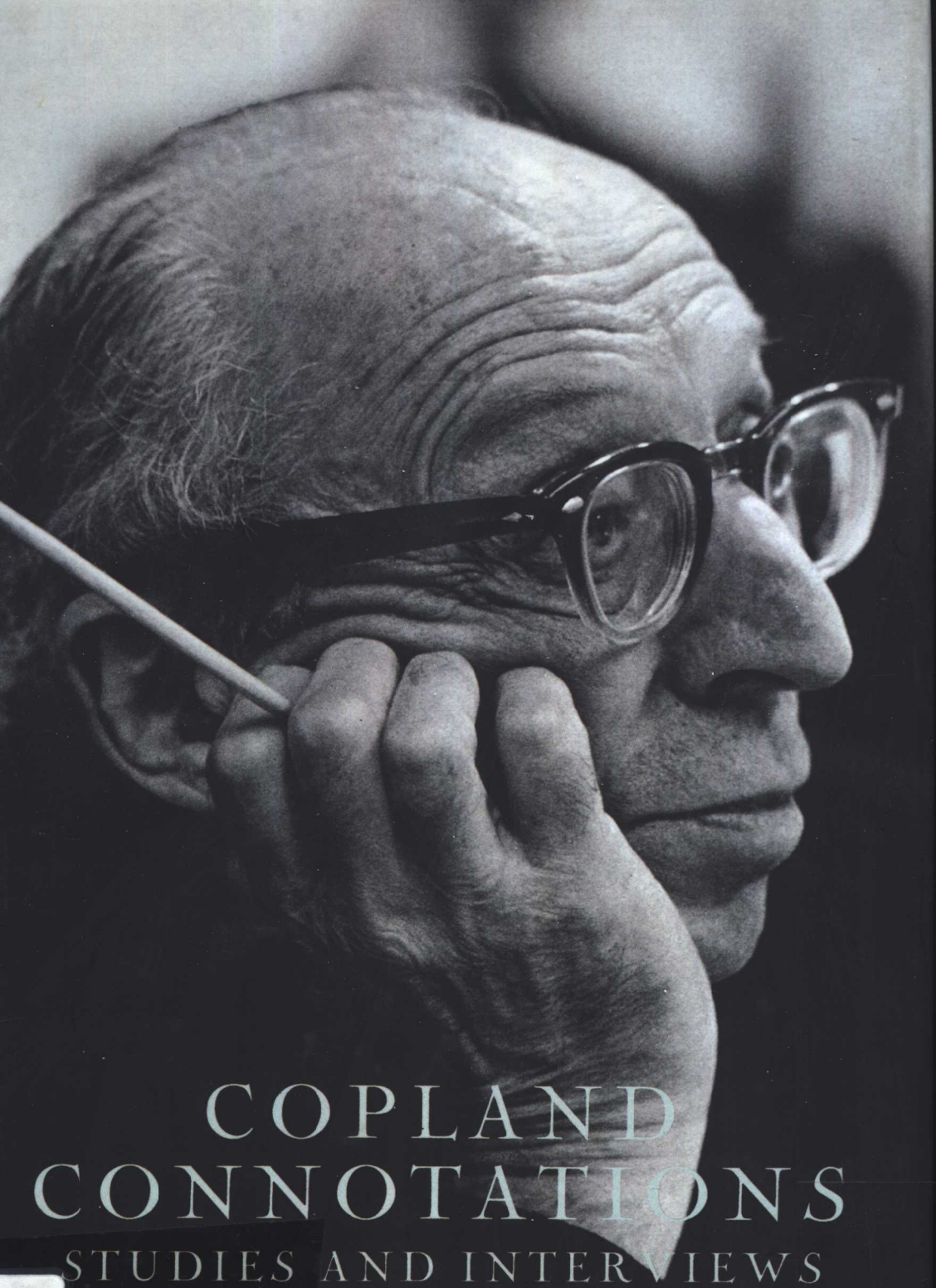

COPLAND CONNOTATIONS

STUDIES AND INTERVIEWS

Edited by Peter Dickinson

Foreword by H. Wiley Hitchcock

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Foreword

H. Wiley Hitchcock

In 1980 the American journal *Perspectives of New Music* published an issue celebrating Aaron Copland's eightieth birthday, to which I contributed a short article titled 'Aaron Copland and American Music'. It began this way:

> For many people, Aaron Copland seems to *be* American music. It's not easy to think of another American composer with so distinctive a voice, or one who is so unarguably recognized the world over as a 'major' composer. Few alive today can even imagine an American musical culture without Copland at the center of it: he has been a forceful, dominant, and much beloved presence ever since he came back to the States from study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in 1921–24. . . . Now, Copland's composing days are over, but he is still active as a conductor, is busily at work on an autobiography, and continues to support in various ways young American composers in particular and American music in general.

'Support' is a key word. Copland's long career was one centered in support of, and in service to, music in general and American music in particular. This is true of his work as a composer, as an organizer and promoter of other composers, and as a writer and speaker. Because of this, more than any other musician of his generation Copland signified, I think, a new degree of *selfhood* for American music. One way this is true is in the yea-saying, optimistic aura of his music. It declares that life as an American composer has precious and cherishable values. Copland wrote, in his Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University during 1951–52, published as *Music and Imagination*, 'Negative emotions cannot produce art. . . . You cannot make art out of fear or suspicion; you can make it only out of affirmative beliefs.' In a commencement address at Brooklyn College in 1975, he volunteered, 'Agony I don't connect with. Not even alienation.' Far from it; and that is a major message of his music. As he put it on the same occasion:

> I have had a broad experience and can summarize that experience, I think, by saying that the work of a composer such as myself implies a kind of positive and affirmative attitude toward one's life. The sense of having one's own contribution to make . . . makes one feel that the life one has led has had meaning, certainly for one's self and, one hopes, for one's fellow man.

Copland's death in 1990 and the bequest of his papers to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, sparked a spate of new research into his life and his music. We see some of the results in this diverse anthology. Its contents also communicate a sense of excitement about recent discoveries, an affirmation of both inquisitiveness and tolerance, and even an engagement with life that remind us of Aaron Copland himself. Some of the essays reflect the broader horizons of the so-called New Musicology, including contextual explorations – into inter-relationships between 'high' and 'low' art, into social taboos and new freedoms, into music's relations to politics and personalities as well as matters sensual and sexual. Others rely on the ever-useful, more traditional approaches to analysis and explication of musical works as self-contained art-objects. Colloquy among seven able discussants and transcriptions of skillful interviews of Aaron Copland himself culminate an exceptionally illuminating mosaic on the composer and his music.

Appropriately, considering the internationalism of its subject (for Copland was not only indebted to France but had good friends in Great Britain and Latin America), the present collection was conceived, planned, solicited, and overseen, not by an American but by an enterprising Briton: Peter Dickinson, not only a composer and pianist but a longtime scholar, performer, admirer and disseminator of American music. Founding director, in 1974, of the Centre for American Music at Keele University (of which he was the first Professor of Music) and now Head of Music at the Institute of United States Studies in the University of London, Professor Dickinson has been an indefatigable author of publications on US composers and their works and an enthusiastic inciter of younger scholars and performers. In fact, he must be regarded as a crucial figure in the rise of American music, over the past quarter-century, to musicological status as an appropriate field for serious scholarly attention on its own account – not just as a country cousin of European music.

Introduction

Peter Dickinson

Copland Connotations is a tribute to a great man, whom I was privileged to meet on several occasions. Our first meeting was in London on 19 August 1974 when he had lunch with me and I took notes on our subsequent conversation. By this time Copland had essentially stopped composing, which gave him something in common with Ives and Varèse. I barely realised this and asked him what he had been writing in the 1970s. He was completely frank and mentioned *Night Thoughts* and the two *Threnodies* but otherwise said there was nothing in manuscript, nothing to talk about and, as elsewhere, used the phrase 'bogged down'. He said it would be nice to write more but that he was enjoying his conducting career. I mentioned Varèse, but not the fact that he was another composer who had composed little in his later years. Instead I said that I wondered if the shadow of Varèse – whose music Copland had known since his twenties – had fallen over *Connotations* and *Inscape.* Copland said he liked Varèse, knew him and thought he looked 'the way a composer should look' but went no further. I asked him again in the second interview at Keele University and he denied the connection.[1] Copland came to Keele on 19 and 20 October 1976 and I asked him then why he did not take the opportunity to conduct *Connotations* and *Inscape*, which seemed to me to be neglected. His reply was that he thought the public preferred other pieces. However, he did conduct *Inscape* with European orchestras and some of these live performances, barely adequate, were released on CD much later.[2]

Although I have related some details of Copland's Keele visit elsewhere, it may

[1] I am unconvinced on the evidence of the percussion break at the start of the scherzo section (bar 128) of *Connotations* and the references back to the *Piano Variations* (bars 13–14), itself a work affected by the insistent sonorous attacks of Varèse. More subtly, the eleventh of the *Piano Variations* uses the opening chord of Varèse's *Intégrales* (transposed up a semi-tone) to underpin a passage of exquisite Copland lyricism.

[2] The Orchestra Nationale de France, Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Paris, 30 June 1971 on Etcetera KTC 1098 (1990); the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Rudolfinum, Prague, 1973 on Romantic Robot RR1973 (1993).

[3] 'Aaron Copland at 85', *Vogue*, June 1986, p. 50; 'The Gramophone Collection: Aaron Copland', *Gramophone*, November 1990 pp. 963–5; 'Copland: the Unappreciated Progeny', *Gramophone*, November 2000, pp. 36–41. Before Copland's visit to Keele University the Music Department

be worth documenting one revealing anecdote with a little more detail here.[3] As Copland and I were leaving for the formal dinner which preceded the concert of his music after which he was going to answer questions, I mentioned that the Cultural Attaché from the United States Embassy in London would be there and that he had published a book on American Music. Copland's response was immediate: 'Yes, I saw it in the bookstore and looked to see what it said about me. Two sentences! I put it right back on the shelf!'[4]

The story shows how well Copland knew his own worth – and so of course do we twelve years after his death and thirty years since he stopped composing. As a result it has been possible to assemble a varied group of authors from all generations arising out of the *Musical Intersections: Toronto 2000* conference held from 1–5 November 2000, and the Copland Centenary Conference put on by the Institute of United States Studies, University of London, on 18 November 2000. All the contributors to *Copland Connotations* were participants, although some have chosen to be represented by different material from their presentations on those occasions. I was delighted when there was general agreement to take part and I particularly welcome the fact that the book contains Copland specialists ranging from present graduate students to established figures.

The section 'Copland and his Context' starts in Paris. Mark DeVoto provides the background for Copland's earliest orchestral works which have been emerging in the last decade as fully capable of standing on their own with absolutely no apologies. *Grohg* is a remarkable first orchestral piece which, thanks to Oliver Knussen, has been recorded and would justify a full-scale ballet production in its original form rather than the extracts used for the *Cortège macabre* or the *Dance Symphony*. It seems extraordinary that a composer of three such successful ballet scores as *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring* should have his earlier works neglected by choreographers. The Organ Symphony should become a classic in a genre where organists seem to be aware only of Handel, Saint-Saens and Poulenc.

David Schiff reassesses Copland's relationship with jazz and describes it as colonial. A comparison occurs to me. I can remember asking Copland at Keele how he felt about having had to work with a corrupt text of Emily Dickinson's poetry. His song cycle was completed in 1950, the year when Harvard University came into ownership of Emily Dickinson's estate. Five years after that, Thomas H. Johnson's variorum edition was published and it contained many surprises, some involving poems set by Copland. For example, 'I felt a funeral in my brain' lacks its final stanza and the last two lines of 'The world feels dusty' were editorially Bowdlerised. Copland's answer to my question

put on a 75th birthday concert on 14 November. This was recorded by BBC Radio 3 and broadcast on 30 December 1976. The performers were the BBC Northern Singers, conductor Stephen Wilkinson, and Peter Dickinson, piano. The programme was: *Lark; Las Agachadas* (Copland); *Paraphrase II*; *Late Afternoon in November* (Dickinson); Four Piano Blues; *Night Thoughts*; *In the Beginning* (Copland).

[4] Irving Sablosky, *American Music*, University of Chicago Press, 1969. Actually Copland was being generous here since he rated one and a half sentences in the entire book.

about the poetry was simply that he had to work with the text that was available to him at the time. I think that much the same could be said about his attitude to jazz which was formed in the 1920s when the term was used to cover dance music and novelty piano as well as what later came to be regarded as the 'real thing' – whatever that may be. As time went on, Copland's conception of jazz obviously became dated but, right or wrong, it fused with his own idiom at a formative stage in unique ways.

Jessica Burr draws attention to Copland's portrayal of the American West as a yardstick for American identity created at a time of social concern in the 1930s. The two cowboy ballets were the primary vehicle but, as with Stravinsky, having composed three popular ballets with folk connections did not guarantee for Copland that the other sides of his personality would reach the larger public. Marta Robertson is not satisfied that there are acceptable criteria for assessing collaborative works such as ballet scores. Her discussion implies that Copland should more often be defined in terms appropriate to his work in ballet and film rather than concert music. On balance, his ballet scores translate to the concert hall better than his film music but that is no reason to ignore the role of applied music in his whole creative orientation and the evident enjoyment this task gave him.

Sally Bick follows by taking Copland's Hollywood career seriously and demonstrating in a detailed study how his writings about the film medium are as carefully considered as anything else he discussed. His understanding of film and the role that music could play in it was so thorough that his ideas on the subject have become seminal. Bick finds that 'Copland's ability to present innovation within the ideals of the classic style may in part provide the key to his enormous success as a Hollywood film composer.' He might have been pleased fifty years later to see film scores, including his own, performed in the concert hall and represented in the CD catalogue.

Pride of place among the contributors to *Copland Connotations* must go to Vivian Perlis who opens the section on 'Copland, Performers and other Composers'. Her magnificent work on the two volumes of memoirs was a major landmark in Copland documentation and succeeded in rescuing his recollections before it was too late. In this book she provides fascinating connections between Copland and John Kirkpatrick, most frequently remembered as the dedicated Ives scholar and pianist. It is touching that in 1974 – the year of the Ives Centenary – Kirkpatrick regretted not having had as much time for Copland. But Copland's response, simply appreciating what Kirkpatrick had done for Ives and therefore for everyone, was typical.

Howard Pollack has made another vital contribution with the first full-scale biography, a study of a kind which could only have been written after the composer's death. Copland told me in 1974 how much he approved of Wilfrid Mellers' chapter on his work in *Music in a New Found Land* (1964). Later, when I went to see him at Rock Hill on 11 May 1981, he confirmed this: 'He's a brilliant writer, Mellers, a brilliant man.' Other British writers who have made valuable studies of Copland include Peter Evans and Bayan

Northcott.[5] But Pollack's *Aaron Copland: the Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (2000) is on the same grand scale as Copland's Third Symphony – appropriate to the centenary. In his chapter in *Copland Connotations* Pollack explores the intriguing subject of Copland and Gershwin and finds some remarkable coincidences as they reach common ground from different traditions.

In a BBC TV feature for his seventy-fifth birthday Copland was asked about the influence of jazz on his work, in particular the Piano Concerto (1926). Fifty years after composing the work he discussed his neglected concerto alongside Gershwin's smash-hit:

> The idea of using (jazz) seriously in a symphonic work was rather new. Of course Gershwin had already done it with his *Rhapsody in Blue* and I wanted to try my hand at it in my Piano Concerto. I would say the polyrhythmic nature of the piece amused me very much. It was normal to have one rhythm at a time in classical music and if you combine two or even three rhythms you get something quite different. I didn't want to write a straight jazz piece but a serious symphonic piece which made use of typically American modes and moods. In other words I was more ambitious than Gershwin was in writing his *Rhapsody in Blue* – I don't say more successful! I was trying to write a concerto for a concert making use of popular material.[6]

Copland's fellow feeling towards Ives emerges again in Larry Starr's study. I remember Copland's generous tributes at the Ives centenary in 1974, along with his musing question: 'How could that man write that music?' Now Starr suggests that interest in Copland has been aroused by the centenary in much the same way that it was for Ives more than a quarter of a century earlier. *Night Thoughts* is an outstanding swan song and I have taken the opportunity of adding my own experiences with Copland in connection with this piece as footnotes to Starr's chapter.

In London in 1974 I asked Copland whether he felt that any of his works were neglected. Unlike the first Keele interview in front of a large audience two years later (pp. 191–2), where he preferred not to name anything, he mentioned the *Short Symphony* where he still found 'every note in the right place'. In terms of the grudging reception accorded this work, and *Connotations* thirty years later, it was no wonder that Copland felt he had something in common with Ives, especially when the *Short Symphony* waited ten years to be heard in the US. Jennifer DeLapp, opening the 'Studies of Individual Works', traces the reception history of the *Short Symphony* in the public arena of newspaper criticism and elsewhere and shows that Copland reflected the intellectual concerns of the times and found himself in the centre of conflicts.

[5] Peter Evans, 'The Thematic Technique of Copland's Recent Works', *Tempo* 51 (1959), pp. 2–13, and 'Copland on the Serial Road: an Analysis of Connotations', *Perspectives of New Music 2*, No.2 (1963–4), pp. 141–9. Bayan Northcott, 'Notes on Copland', *Musical Times* 122, No.1653 (November 1980), pp. 686–9.

[6] *Happy Birthday Aaron Copland: a 75th Birthday Tribute to the Dean of American Composers*, produced by Rodney Greenberg, BBC 2, 16 November 1975.

To many listeners at the time and since, Copland's tougher music has seemed too far removed from the composer of the three popular ballets. But his most striking images have fed back into an overall popular culture from which they are assumed to have been derived. In the second of his interviews at Keele (p. 198) I told Copland that I had heard it suggested that he had influenced popular music as much as popular music had influenced him. Again, with typical modesty, he said: 'I don't think that's true. I'd like it to be true but I don't think it's true.' William Brooks disagrees. In his detailed study of the various incarnations of 'Simple gifts' he comes to the conclusion that 'Copland's music affected the course of America's folk and popular traditions far more than they affected his music.'

Daniel E. Mathers covers an aspect of Copland which has not so far been raised in *Copland Connotations* – his private life. The context for the discussion is *The Tender Land* where Mathers had unique access to Erik Johns, the librettist, until his tragic accidental death in 2001. The opera has been neglected, at least above the level of college performances, and it may be that Mathers' careful prising open of the issues behind the libretto can deepen its resonance and widen its relevance in the twenty-first century. After his discussion, it is going to be difficult to get back to regarding *The Tender Land* as a straightforward narrative.

The *Piano Fantasy* found Copland at the farthest extreme from his public. Arnold Whittall trains his analytical searchlight onto the score of this extended piece with revealing results. The interaction between the lyrical and the dramatic, which Whittall refers to again in the Forum Discussion (p. 175), is as crucial here as in any Copland and is perhaps at a more personal level since the piano was Copland's own instrument, although he never played the *Fantasy*. The intimate nature of the expression marks, as refined as those in late Skryabin, suggests a private world with the *Fantasy* operating as a kind of surrealist clavichord music. Copland took steps to reconcile this world with the larger public. To some extent it was taking place in his film music, but he symbolically orchestrated the *Piano Variations* (as *Orchestral Variations*), which was premiered in 1958, the year after the *Piano Fantasy*. Thus the gauntlet thrown down by the angry young man in 1930 could be relaunched by the Dean of American Composers almost thirty years later. Now Copland could afford his dissonances but the price could still be high. When *Connotations* exploded in the public arena at the opening of Lincoln Center in 1962, it was greeted by the celebrity audience with the same kind of disdain as Britten's opera *Gloriana*, composed to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, when it was given at Covent Garden in 1953. Audience expectations had been disrupted, much as they were when Bernstein used to play the *Piano Variations* at parties and emptied the room: even the critical reaction to *Connotations* was affected.

'Responses to Copland' opens with Stephen Banfield's look at Copland's influence on Broadway and he considers that 'the musical worlds of Broadway and Carnegie Hall always were and still are quite separate'. Banfield makes further comparisons with Gershwin and also mentions the direct influence of *El salón México* on Bernstein. Since this was the first of Copland's larger works to achieve

widespread popularity, it may be worth noting what Copland said when he was asked in 1975 if he wrote *El salón México* more for the audience than himself:

> I never write anything more for my audience than myself. No, I was writing something that pleased me immensely. It was lighter and bouncier than a serious symphony, but I hope it has my quality and character and, of course, I hoped the audience would like it.[7]

In 1981 the pianist John Browning told me that Samuel Barber 'wrote for the public: he was very conscious of public reaction and he wanted things to be theatrically successful'. He contrasted this with the way that the Copland Piano Sonata 'has not achieved the kind of performance that it should because it ends so softly and the audience just doesn't get it'.[8]

By comparison with Barber, Copland may not have written so consistently for his public and my own chapter on 'Copland's Earlier British Connections' shows how he could be crassly misunderstood in either popular or serious vein. That dichotomy hangs over the Open Forum Discussion, with largely British participants, and emerged – as so often – in one of the questions Copland was asked in his first interview at Keele. Commentators, and Copland himself, have struggled to see his output whole. However, Bayan Northcott regards the *Piano Fantasy* and *Appalachian Spring* as the same music with different notes (p. 177). Lawrence Starr, discussing Copland's style in 1980, said, 'The great diversity among these works suggests not any lack of focus or direction, but on the contrary the great breadth of Aaron Copland's unified vision.'[9] Twenty years later Tom Service, reviewing a centenary concert given in the Royal Festival Hall, London, with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin, acknowledged: 'Hearing *Connotations* just after hearing *Appalachian Spring* revealed that although Copland's oeuvre may seem to contain a schizophrenic split between abstraction and accessibility, there is a genuine continuity between all his works.'[10] William Brooks regards the fact that Copland's music leaves us asking questions of this kind as the proof of his greatness. So finally it is Copland himself who is causing us to adjust our critical apparatus in order to hear things his way. I ended my 75th birthday tribute with these words, which may not be out of place here:

> In an age of neurotic soul-searching and tension, Copland's music of affirmation is a beacon of optimism worthy of the best in the American spirit. Everyone who cares about the state of music today, or is involved in teaching, performing or composing, must be grateful to him for what he has achieved and what he has stood for as man and composer for more than half a century.[11]

[7] *Happy Birthday Aaron Copland: a 75th Birthday Tribute to the Dean of American Composers*, produced by Rodney Greenberg, BBC 2, 16 November 1975.

[8] 'Samuel Barber', BBC Radio 3 documentary by Peter Dickinson, produced by Arthur Johnson, broadcast on 23 January 1982.

[9] 'Copland's Style', *Perspectives of New Music* 19, No.1 (1980–1), pp. 69–87.

[10] Tom Service, 'Unknown Pleasures', *Guardian*, 30 June 2000.

[11] *Musical Times* 116, No.1593 (November 1975), pp. 967–70.

Acknowledgements

The impetus for *Copland Connotations* came when Howard Pollack invited me to give a paper at the *Musical Intersections: Toronto 2000* conference as part of a session entitled 'Copland: A Centennial Retrospective III – Copland as a World Figure', which he was going to chair. This took place on 4 November under the auspices of the Society for American Music, of which I was a founder member. I returned to London for the Copland Centenary Concert presented by the Institute of United States Studies, in conjunction with the Royal Academy of Music, on 15 November. This was given by the Royal Academy Soloists, directed by Clio Gould, and the programme consisted of the *Hoe-Down* from *Rodeo* (arranged for strings), *Quiet City*, Rondino (from Two Pieces for strings) and *Appalachian Spring* (complete ballet): it was subsequently broadcast on the BBC World Service. On 18 November the Institute's Copland Centenary Conference took place at King's College London.

I should like to thank those organisations and individuals who helped to make these events possible because they led towards this book – the John Coffin Memorial Fund; the United States Embassy in London through Robin Berrington and his colleagues; Boosey & Hawkes Ltd.; the Institute of United States Studies, especially its Director, Gary McDowell, and Lucy Pratt; and Irene Auerbach at the Music Department of King's College.

I had hoped to publish the papers of the British-based participants but I soon realised that a far more valuable book would result if the American contributors could be persuaded to come in too. This has happened and I have much valued my collaboration with all the authors. Now, less than two years after the papers were delivered, *Copland Connotations* is in print. For this fortunate outcome I am much indebted to the staff of the publishers, Boydell & Brewer Ltd, especially to Caroline Palmer, who made many suggestions about the structure of the book, and Pru Harrison, who dealt with details and computing matters. I was particularly fortunate in being able to draw on the long experience of Nigel Fortune at the copy-editing stage and I have benefited from the advice and encouragement of H. Wiley Hitchcock, Vivian Perlis and Howard Pollack in the US and Bruce Phillips and Arnold Whittall in the UK.

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The Aaron Copland Fund has generously allowed the Copland interviews to be published for the first time and I have appreciated the assistance of Laura Mankin. If any other permissions have been neglected, this is unintentional and will be remedied at the next opportunity. Finally, I am delighted to have Clive Barda's magisterial portrait of Copland in 1971 as both frontispiece and jacket.

PETER DICKINSON