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Folk Influences of Aaron Copland and Britten

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FOLK INFLUENCES OF AARON COPLAND AND BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Tyler Krug

Tyler Krug Folk Influences of Aaron Copland and Benjamin Britten
by
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Folk Influences of Aaron Copland and Benjamin Britten

in the more recent past, nationalism, or a pride in one's country, has been the dominating factor for much of the world's historical events. Wars have been propagandized, countries have been fundamentally built, destroyed and reinvigorated, and for better or worse, this principle influences one's belief. In conjunction with technology, folk music has always been used as an exploit for the reasons listed above; therefore, it has been used as an exploit. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, composers used the music of their homeland and integrate the melodies of their countries into the classical format. This allowed the composer to explore new compositional styles and achieve a sentimental connection with a broader audience. In a new musical world that defined the composer as a "starving artist," unique and enjoyable music was crucial to success. Folk music was not used as the epitome of a composer's sound, rather as a tool to create a greater spectrum of sound.

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In the more recent past, nationalism, or a pride in one's country, has been the dominating factor for much of the world's historical events. Wars have been propagandized, countries have been fundamentally built, destroyed and reinvigorated, and for better or worse, this principle influences one's beliefs today as one's knowledge of the world expands in conjunction with technology. Folk music has always been a form of national pride and has been used as an exploit for the reasons listed above; therefore composers have maintained an interest in a national sound. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, composers began to use the music of their homeland and integrate the melodies of their countries into the classical format. This allowed the composer to explore new compositional styles and achieve a sentimental connection with a broader audience. In a new musical world that defined the composer as a "starving artist," unique and enjoyable music was crucial to success. Folk music was not used as the epitome of a composer's sound, rather as a foundation for new compositional ideas. The walls of harmonic and melodic rules were disintegrating, giving the composer a greater spectrum of options as to how folk melodies could potentially be set. The eclectic settings of folk music, including the settings of Percy Grainger, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Roger Quilter, Aaron Copland and Benjamin Britten, assisted in creating new national identities in the world of classical music during the twentieth century, especially in the young United States and the long-established England. This was the birth, or in the case of England, rebirth, of sounds that could be labeled as distinctly "American" or "English."

It is important first to define the term folk song. Daniel Kingman defines it as an “organic whole, consisting of words, a tune and a way of singing” (Kingman 7). Each of these characteristics are equally important in recognizing a folk song as authentic. Before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, folk song was generally shared by oral means. The consequence of the oral tradition is that as a song spreads, words are altered, omitted and added to the song to fit individual or societal desires; therefore it is impossible to know if the words heard today were actually anything like the words sung centuries ago. While words represent the muscle of a folk song, the skeletal structure belongs strictly to the melody. In the earliest versions of folk song, the melody was sung alone. However, instruments such as the dulcimer, banjo and the guitar slowly became associated with folk-song over time (Kingman 15). The distinguishing feature of the folk organism is the way of singing the song, which can differ depending on the location. Each area of a nation has a unique dialect that provides color to the folk song, thus the folk song is most authentic in a concert setting when the way of singing matches a way similar to the original. This information has been culminated by many folk song collectors around the world.

Folk songs have been written about many different aspects of life. There are blacksmith songs, mining songs, cowboy songs, farming songs, etc. The goal of these songs was simply to add excitement to the monotony of life characterized by the tasks workers were expected to do every day. The popular folk song *I've Been Working on the Railroad* provides a prime example of this purpose. The lyrics of the first verse reads, “I’ve been working on the railroad all the live-long day. I’ve been working on the railroad just to pass the time away.” Another purpose of folk song is to tell a short and simple story for entertainment, best represented in the form of a ballad. Often the stories throw the listener into a plot without much background information, allowing

the imagination of the listener to create his or her own version of the story based on the song (Kingman 6).

Folk song clearly adds life and excitement to a diverse group of people, but the characteristics that have made folk song such an integral part of our lives are much more latent in concept. These songs represent our national identity, and according to Ralph Vaughan Williams, folk song is a "common medium." Folk song is not too high or low-brow, and any group of people can relate to one song or another, making it perfect for its revival in the twentieth century for the concert stage in both America and Britain (Vaughan Williams 39).

British folk song has a long and rich history which is still studied and performed today. Because there are so few records made before the last five centuries, little is known about the earliest origins of folk music in Britain, but Wynkyn de Worde's published collection of Robin Hood ballads provides the first printed evidence that traditional folk song existed in 1495 (Sweers 44-45). This indicates that folk song existed but was simply kept in the social consciousness by oral means, but preservation of traditional songs was not a concern of the English until two centuries later. As the divide between the aristocracy and lower class widened, art and culture followed suit, and popular styles became polarized between the two classes. Consequently, to preserve an art that had become foreign to those outside the lower class, collections of folk songs and dances began to emerge, including Playford's extensive *The English Dancing Master* (1651) and Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) (Sweers 45). Further scholarly collections broadened the historical context of English folk music, including collections by Professor Cecil Sharp and composers Ralph Vaughan Williams and Percy Grainger. Historians and composers now had detailed and concrete resources,

including prints and recordings, of the authentic folk music of Great Britain as it was in the nineteenth century.

The integrity of classical English song as a whole preceding the career of Benjamin Britten was incredibly weak. Composers were said to show “a uniform lack of musical imagination” (Banfield 3). However, this was a symptom of greed rather than sincerity. Stephen Banfield states:

“It was the attitude of Victorian England to music as an exportable or importable - and on occasions expendable - commodity based largely on proven international standards of design and dimension which led to the ballad style, immediately recognizable by its very lack of distinction...” (Banfield 3-4)

The ballad referred to in the quotation is the “Royalty Ballad.” This was a song for which publishers paid royalties. However, the royalties went not only to the composer, but to the professional singer who would advertise the song in a concert setting (Banfield 4). The hopes were that after hearing a performance, the populace would adore the song enough to purchase it for themselves. These songs exploited the sentimental nature of English sound. The Royalty Ballads lacked technical brilliance and used cookie-cutter formulas that allowed composers and publishers to release new songs as quickly as they wanted. These techniques include bland homophonic accompaniments, completely separate from the melody that values high notes over beautiful phrases. It was a crooked practice that became a blatant problem in English classical music, so much so that sheet-music would be headed with, “Sung by...” Out of the “Royalty Ballad” came the “Ballad Concert” where four or five singers would perform their own ballads as another way of advertising the music for publishers. However, there were a number of notable composers who helped lead English song out of the depths of the commercial abyss. Roger Quilter (1877-1953) was known for his technically brilliant settings of English texts. His music is known to be meticulous as well as charming, but Quilter, like many of his contemporaries, was

a product of his time. Some believe him to be more a man of potential rather than practice. Scott Goddard says:

“He has preferred to proceed along the paths of facile interpretation of texts which are often either trite or smug.” (Banfield 128).

English composer and President of the English Folk Dance and Song Society Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) is partially responsible for the resurgence of interest in folk music of the twentieth century. The composer collected and set many songs as hymn tunes, vocal and orchestral works. However, Ralph Vaughan Williams' compositional style is vastly different than that of Benjamin Britten. The composer studied in Paris, France from 1907 to 1908 with composer Maurice Ravel, and in his studies, the composer had "a bad attack of French fever" and adopted the contemporary French musical style promoting washes of color over meticulous detail (RVW Society), and this is best exemplified in *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons* for chorus and orchestra. While interest in folk settings was building, the latent beauty of folk song had not yet been achieved until the music of Benjamin Britten.

Benjamin Britten was born in the town of Suffolk, England before World War I in 1913. Britten began studying music at an early age, owing the earliest exposure to his mother and her provision of a piano for the young composer. Britten then studied in an institutional setting at the Royal Academy of Music beginning in 1929 under composer John Ireland. His time at the Royal Academy was more a period of self-discovery rather than technical training. John Ireland was not well-suited to assist Britten in reaching his full potential, and their time together was often strained by Ireland's strict philosophies of composition. Banfield states, “He went to a composition lesson, and Ireland told him to write a song ‘with a note to each syllable.’ He knew at least what to react to and rebel against” (Banfield 384). While his time at the Royal Academy

proved largely ineffective, Britten found a proper teacher in English composer Frank Bridge, who would not only instill his compositional values, but his strong, unwavering opinions that would inspire Britten's music throughout his career. The main philosophy Frank Bridge sought to impress on the young composer is that music must not suffer from a lack of thought and that, "you should find yourself and be true to what you found" (Mitchell). It was with Bridge that Benjamin Britten was able to refine his musical mind and develop a compositional style marked by sophistication and meticulousness.

Benjamin Britten was a man of both careful thought and raw passion, the latter being a driving factor in his international career. The perplexed personal identity, defined by extreme pacifism and homosexuality, which Britten was hesitant to fully embrace, led him to escape the unkind conditions of England to the United States from 1939-1942 with his partner, tenor Peter Pears, where Britten would further develop his compositional style. It was abroad that Britten began to discover the importance of his national identity. The composer missed his homeland, and after struggling with the English government due in part to the conflict of World War II, Britten returned to England. Upon his return, the composer sought to "restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom, and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell" (Mitchell and Keller 49). Britten achieved this goal by setting music in a number of fashions, including opera, choral and instrumental works. Notable works include the opera *Peter Grimes*, *Suite on English folk tunes (A time there was)*, for orchestra, *Op. 90*, and many folk song settings. Britten was determined to demonstrate the beauty of the English language, and this meant a rebirth of English sound through the elements of British folk music of the past. While the previous generation, including Ralph Vaughan Williams and John Ireland, interpreted folk songs on a surface level, Britten employed the lessons taught to him by Frank

Bridge and searched for the latent beauty of every word and melody. Britten employed a certain complexity of music as a means of adding depth to his works including dynamic harmonic textures, startling dissonances and carefully-written polyphony. He applied these techniques to French, Scottish, Irish and English songs while simultaneously embracing the sentimental nature of well-known folk melodies across Europe. In doing so, Britten provided fresh material in a genre that had grown largely stagnant over the previous centuries. Two notable songs from his folk collections include “The Ash Grove” and “The Miller of Dee.”

“The Ash Grove” is a Welsh folk-tune with a known history dating over two centuries. The first published version of the tune, known as “Llwyn Onn,” appeared in 1802 in harpist Edward Jones’ songbook, *The Bardic Museum*. The title and lyrics to “The Ash Grove” were first published in 1862 by John Thomas in Welsh and Thomas Oliphant provides the English lyrics to Britten’s arrangement. The song has also been arranged as a number of hymn tunes including “Let all Things Now Living” (1939), “Sent Forth by God’s Blessing” (1964), and by Roger Quilter in his collection *Arnold Book of Old Songs* (1950). The original setting of “The Ash Grove” is very simple, following strictly the diatonic structure of the melody. The accompaniment is also very sparse and utilizes one note at a time and seldom uses polyphony. Edward Jones also provides chordal and arpeggiated accompaniment in a variation of the tune, both well-suited for a harp. The texts reads:

“Down yonder green valley, where streamlets meander,
 When twilight is fading I pensively rove.
 Or at the bright noontide in solitude wander,
 Amid the dark shades of the lonely ash grove;
 ‘T was there, while the blackbird was cheerfully singing,
 I first met that dear one, the joy of my heart!
 Around us for gladness the bluebells were ringing,
 Ah! then little thought I how soon we should part.
 Still glows the bright sunshine o'er valley and mountain,
 Still warbles the blackbird its note from the tree;
 Still trembles the moonbeam on streamlet and fountain,

But what are the beauties of nature to me?
With sorrow, deep sorrow, my bosom is laden,
All day I go mourning in search of my love;
Ye echoes, oh, tell me, where is the sweet maiden?
"She sleeps, 'neath the green turf down by the ash grove."

The song, both somber and sweet, is sung by a man who has gone to a graveyard in the ash grove to find his love who had long since died. As he wanders through the ash grove in search of his love, he describes the everlasting beauty of a blackbird's song, ringing bells, bright sunshine and moonbeams on fountains of water. However, this eternal beauty is tainted by the loss of his loved one. He continues to trudge around the ash grove with his "bosom laden" in search of his love. In desperation, the man asks the echoes of past and present where his love rests, hoping the reply will allow him to resurrect his lover. However, the echoes solemnly respond that she forever sleeps "neath the green turf down by the ash grove."

Benjamin Britten remains very true to the melody but treats the accompaniment in an intriguing way. Generally the accompaniment is its own solo line, in both hands for the first verse and the right hand in the second with rolled chords in the left, imitating the plucking of strings of a harp. The piano introduction is a heavily fragmented version of the melody leading to a dominant chord and the introduction of the vocal line. Throughout the first verse, the harmonic texture is very sparse and remains diatonic, similar to the original tune. This represents the still calm nature of the singer who has just begun wandering around the grove, remembering the blissful days when he and his love first met. However, Britten provides unusual color using imitative and polyphonic techniques. The piano introduces each melodic line a measure prior to the vocal line, exemplified in measures four through nine. This creates an unsettling atmosphere juxtaposed to the simple and comforting melody. The melodic accompaniment acts as its own

character, perhaps as the memory of his love. Throughout, the left and right hand follow this pattern in parallel motion without falter, remaining a tenth or eleventh apart.

In the second verse, Britten expounds upon the imitative and polyphonic elements in the right hand by adding rolled chords in the left hand as shown in measures forty-one through forty-four. These chords last only an eighth note and represent a harp's quick decay of sound. As the singer's thoughts shift from the blissful days of past to the dark and lonesome realization of the present, the harmonic language becomes incredibly dissonant. He describes many beauties of nature including warbling blackbirds and trembling moonbeams, but asks, "What are the beauties nature to me?" (mm. 54-56). The harmonic progression remains similar to that of the first verse, but the dissonances create a bitter sensation, as if the wonderful memories of the first verse have become bleak and despairing. These dissonances including a Gb against the tonic Ab in measure forty-two, a Gb against a G natural in the Eb chord of forty-four, the tonic Ab chord against a Cb, A natural, Ab and Gb in measure fifty, and a first inversion Bb half-diminished seventh in fifty-one. These dissonances create a dark subtext juxtaposing the luscious melody. As stated previously, the harmonic progression remains similar until measure sixty-four. The lyric, "I go mourning in search of my love," is characterized by a C minor chord before returning to the tonic, whereas the first verse employed a dominant to tonic relationship in the same melodic phrase on the happier lyric, "I first met my dear one, the joy of my heart" (mm. 24-28). Following this lyric, the dissonance is subdued when he comes to terms once again that his love is deceased, creating an empty and melancholy atmosphere until the end of the song. The application and alteration of the harmonic language, imitative polyphony and harp-like texture create a dynamic story against an unwavering, sweet melodic line.

“The Miller of Dee” is an English Folk song dating from around the same time as “The Ash Grove.” Specifically the song originates from the Chester area of England, upon which runs the River Dee. The first version of this song is found in Isaac Bickerstaffe’s play, *Love in a Village* (1762). Bickerstaffe employed the traditional Welsh melody “Llydaw,” meaning “Brittany” in the traditional language. However, “The Miller of Dee” is more frantic and irritated than the tune-name might inspire. The text reads:

“There was a jolly miller once lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sung from morn till night, no lark more blithe than he.
And this the burden of his song for ever used to be:
"I care for nobody, no, not I, since nobody cares for me.

I love my mill, she is to me like parent, child and wife,
I would not change my station for any other in life.
Then push, push, push the bowl, my boys, and pass it round to me,
The longer we sit here and drink, the merrier we shall be."

So sang the jolly miller, who lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sung from morn till night, no lark more blithe than he.
And this the burden of his song for ever used to be:
"I care for nobody, no not I, since nobody cares for me."”

The song describes a “Jolly Miller” who works each day from morning until night. The miller is loud and obnoxious, described by the statement, “no lark more blithe than he,” indicating a sense of insecurity. However, the miller states, “I care for nobody, no, not I, since nobody cares for me,” absolving himself of any responsibility. The miller then mocks human relations by comparing his work to “parent, child and wife,” and states happiness is achieved not through these relationships, but drinking. The narrator then repeats the first verse with the intent of revealing the insecure, passive-aggressive nature of the miller. The miller does not truly believe his words. However, he embraces the persona because now the mill is all he has. The text details the miller, seemingly happy with his lonesome life working all day, on a surface level, leaving the sub-text to be interpreted in the harmony and accompaniment. The latent emotion is

incredibly passive-aggressive, and the minor key and dissonances Benjamin Britten employs sets the mood appropriately.

Throughout the song, Britten maintains an ostinato pattern of ascending and descending thirds of sixteenth notes. Often on the crest of this ostinato, Britten punctuates the accompaniment with a minor or major second as indicated in measures eighteen through twenty-one. This ostinato pattern represents the constant motion of the mill while adding a layer of distress and unease with the equally constant dissonances as if a pin was constantly pinching someone in the side in a torturous manner. In a similar setting of the song, Roger Quilter also uses an ostinato pattern to represent the mill. However, the ostinato often strays from its intervallic consistency and is used more to provide a warmer color, mixed with a thicker harmonic language. The first verse introduces the character as the "Jolly Miller." However, it is hard to believe his happiness is sincere recognizing the minor tonality and constant dissonance. The texture of this verse is very sparse, relying mainly on the ostinato pattern in the right hand to carry the movement of the melody, while left-hand interjections provide passive-aggressive jabs exemplified in measures five and six and nine through fourteen.

The dissonant punctuations only become more aggressive in the second verse as the same minor second interval is introduced in the crossed left hand an octave higher. The harmonic structure remains the same as the first verse, but the left-hand interjections are now doubled by an octave, creating a heavier and angrier texture. This occurs when the Miller mentions bitterly that the mill is to him like a "parent, child and wife" in measures twenty-two and twenty-three. The final verse returns to the spare texture of the first verse, without a left-hand accompaniment except for the interjections and the ostinato pattern marked with the crested dissonances. This is a consequence of the reiteration of the text that begins with, "So sang the jolly miller who lived

on the River Dee" (mm. 37-41) and ends repeating the lyrics from the first verse, including the statement, "I care for nobody no, not I, since nobody cares for me." However this line is repeated twice with the second broken into fragments as if the miller is realizing the fault of his logic. On each fragment the left-hand plays a single sustained note, striking A2 on the lowest end of the staff, D2 and A1 (mm.56-58). The song ends as the ostinato pattern slows and dies at the bottom of the wave-pattern. Through dissonances, clever treatment of the right hand symbolizing the mill, and left-hand interjections, Britten creates an unnerving atmosphere that the miller embraces by the end of the song. He loses confidence in his logic and the mill comes to a halt.

The product of Britten's compositional style is often not sentimental in nature and requires an in-depth knowledge of the setting and text to truly appreciate. However, Britten's brilliant settings of British folk songs alongside his numerous other works, treated with the same delicacy as the folk songs detailed above, established English music as a dominant force in the twentieth century after centuries of international condescension.

American folk music is more difficult to define. Because of the diversity the United States has embraced for centuries, a wide variety of music from different communities can be considered national folk music. These communities include Indian-American, Anglo-American, Appalachian, German-American, Mexican-American, African-American and many more. Each group of people drew upon their roots and created folk music similar in style. Many ballad variations, numerous dances, cowboy songs, sea shanties, gospel and spirituals create the expansive repertoire considered American folk. However, each community and their associated song types draw upon elements of songs from their homelands. Many of the Anglo-American songs are derived from English folk, considering harmonic structures and methods of accompaniment including the fiddle, guitar and harpsichord. Howard McKinney states,

“Some of our loveliest songs came from England, Scotland, and Ireland with the people who settled in the backlands of the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains sections of the south. Because of the complete isolation of the descendants of these people from the rest of the country, many of these Anglo-American songs have remained unchanged to this day” (McKinney 50).

However, it is often difficult to know the exact origins of many other tunes and lyrics simply because of a lack of written records. American folk music suffered largely a similar fate that English folk experienced. Due to the deep regional rooting and lack of migration until the nineteenth century, some folk songs were kept secret until the twentieth century. The American folk music revival was largely a consequence of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. Individuals now had an incentive to travel around the United States and move to cities for paying jobs. This commotion stirred cultural expression and local musical ideas spread nationally. Not only were ideas shared, but the American people began to form a national identity not yet known, especially during difficult economic times such as the Great Depression and war. It was no longer about belonging to a region so much as being an American. To connect with this newfound identity, musicologists began traveling the United States, collecting numerous recordings of American folk for scholarly purposes. Two of the most important collectors of American song during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries include Olive Dame Campbell and Englishman Cecil Sharp. Campbell traveled to the Appalachians to study the culture in hopes of improving the regional education system. While there, she discovered a strong similarity between Appalachian songs and the English and Irish ballads.

It took time for American folk music to reach the classical stage in the art song format. It may be said American art song began during the Colonial period, but according to Daniel Kingman, American art song languished “until mid-nineteenth century, intended for home consumption, and at the end of the nineteenth century and first two decades of 20th, begin to

transcend former limitations and lay foundations for a mature American Art song” (Kingman 414). Aaron Copland was one of the first American composers to provide a classical American style of music.

Aaron Copland was a Jewish-American composer who composed popular orchestral works such as *Appalachian Spring*, *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. He was born in 1900 and reared in Brooklyn, NY where the artistic community was bleak. The composer, against his parents’ initial wishes, sought musical training, and studied a number of years under German composer Rubin Goldmark before embarking on an excursion to Paris, France to study with the renowned pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger. Much like Frank Bridge to Benjamin Britten, Boulanger instilled the value of integrity in the young composer’s mind. In Paris, Copland made connections that would assist him in his return to the United States three years later. Throughout the rest of the twenties, Copland managed to make enough money to survive on commissions alone, and it was during this time that he began to focus his compositional energies on creating something uniquely American. He reflected on the state of contemporary American music, realizing that American composers were not performed often enough to make an impact. Copland was an important figure in helping to create a number of American music festivals at Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs, New York. (Copland 159). The composer then thrust his compositions into the jazz idiom, a distinct American style. However, the composer was not satisfied with jazz as the sole American musical symbol; therefore he retracted from the genre but not without maintaining the “rhythmic element of jazz, being independent of mood, yet purely indigenous” in his following compositions (Copland 159).

The beginning of the 1930’s marked a pivotal time in Copland’s career. The composer was struggling financially, and he found himself confiding in the political “Left,” almost to the

point of being labeled as a socialist. This group of individuals believed that now more than ever, a distinct American sound was vital to the health of the country suffering through the Great Depression. The people needed new music to call their own. Copland's response to this was to embrace the new technologies that would reach a larger audience and create music that was easier for this audience to appreciate. The key to Aaron Copland's success during this period was the "imposed simplicity" of his music (Copland 160). The composer employed folk tunes in a number of works, including *Billy the Kid*, *Appalachian Spring*, and *Lincoln Portrait*. In these works the folk melodies are clear, and they allow the listener a gentle grasp of musical knowledge to appreciate the artistic beauty. The harmonic textures are often incredibly wide and employ open fourths, fifths and sevenths to symbolize the expansiveness of a young America. While melodies are often easy to follow, and harmonies do not stray far from its tonal center, Copland uses intricate rhythmic patterns not to dissolve, but increase the rhythmic integrity of the music while adding flavor by avoiding downbeat stresses. Copland's folk arrangements work largely the same way. His arrangements are organized in the collection *Old American Songs*. The success of the first set of five songs, written and published in 1950, inspired a second set of five more songs, written and published in 1952. Copland arranged many different types of songs for this collection, including a ballad, a children's song, an Anglo-American song and a Revivalist song. While some contemporary techniques are employed, mainly the melody stands alone, allowing the song to be easily followed by any listener. Two notable songs from *Old American Songs* include "Long Time Ago" and "Simple Gifts."

"Long Time Ago" is the third song in the first set of *Old American Songs*. The music is taken from the Harris Collection at the Brown University Library. The collection is one of the largest in the United States, composed of 250,000 poems, plays and songs, and Copland used this

collection for three of the ten *Old American Songs*. The song was issued in 1837 by George Pope Morris, who provided the lyrics, and Charles Edward Horn, who provided the music, adapting the song from an anonymous minstrel tune. Much like “The Ash Grove” arranged by Benjamin Britten, “Long Time Ago” tells the story of love and life lost. The text reads:

“On the lake where droop'd the willow
 Long time ago,
 Where the rock threw back the billow
 Brighter than snow.
 Dwelt a maid beloved and cherish'd
 By high and low,
 But with autumn leaf she perished
 Long time ago.
 Rock and tree and flowing water
 Long time ago,
 Bird and bee and blossom taught her
 Love's spell to know.
 While to my fond words she listen'd
 Murmuring low,
 Tenderly her blue eyes glisten'd
 Long time ago.”

The text and music are both tender and remain so throughout the song. Much like “The Ash Grove,” the singer recalls the beauty of nature of the past. Each beauty is related to a specific memory of his love, from the beginning of their relationship until her death. These include a drooping willow, under which he first found his love, flowing water and flower-blossoms which “taught her Love’s spell to know.” Finally, the singer recalls her beautiful, glistening blue eyes, which, like the beauties of nature described in the song, existed “Long time ago,” but no longer.

The tender sentiment expressed in the text is reflected in the singable nature of the song which employs few leaps. The repetition of the melody in each verse also adds to the tender nature, but to fully embrace this emotional ambiance, the accompaniment is sparse and uses large leaps of an octave or more to avoid thick harmonic textures as exemplified in measures one

through four. Copland then utilizes an ostinato pattern of eighth notes in the right hand to further remove the accompaniment from the foreground (mm. 5-10). Copland also uses the second-inversion tonic chord, naturally unsettled, leading to the dominant without a seventh in measures seven and eight, drawing upon the expansive nature of this harmonic progression on the repeating lyric "Long time ago." Copland then treats the accompaniment more melodically in the second verse. The right hand and vocal line are nearly parallel to each other in measures fourteen through twenty-one. However, small variations in rhythm consequently create a subtle counterpoint between the two entities, as if the memories are nearly their own character, but the variations are too subtle to draw attention away from the main melody.

This counterpoint is immediately removed in the following verse as Copland suspends the harmonic progression on the tonic chord in the left hand with constant, drone-like eight notes in measures twenty-five through thirty. However, the harmonic progression, while faint, remains alive in the right hand through grace notes and syncopated descending quarter notes throughout the verse. In the final verse, the singer remembers his lover's blue eyes, and the accompaniment then becomes the most active it has been. The left hand returns to the expansive texture employed in the first verse, but the right hand uses two sequenced rhythmic patterns in measures thirty-four through thirty-five and thirty-seven through thirty-nine. The first represents a variation on the melody while the second serves as a symbolic representation of his lover dying as the sixteenth notes dance in the upper register before descending to the dominant above B \flat three. The postlude recycles the music from the interludes between each verse. Copland sought to exercise a minimal amount of counterpoint while still keeping the melody in the foreground. The wide textures of the song and typical harmonic progression allow this counterpoint to be minimally invasive.

“Simple Gifts,” song four of the first set of *Old American Songs*, is Copland’s most popular arrangement and served as the fundamental theme in his monumental 1944 ballet, *Appalachian Spring*. As the name might indicate, this was a popular song among the Shakers, or “The United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing,” from 1837-1847. The Shakers lead communal and frugal lives, dedicating themselves to perfecting the difficult labors of farming and hand-crafting. The lyrics and melody are derived from Shaker scholar Edward D. Andrews’ book *The Gift to be Simple*. The text reads:

“’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 gained,
 To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed,
 To turn, turn will be our delight,
 Till by turning, turning we come ’round right.”

The frugal nature of the Shaker society is well-reflected by the opening text, “’Tis the gift to be simple ’tis the gift to be free.” The singer assures the audience that a frugal lifestyle will lead one to “the valley of love and delight.” To inspire the audience, the singer then states, that “to bow and to bend [against worldly desires] we shan’t be ashamed.” The singer understands the difficulty of resisting worldly desires; therefore he states, “To turn will be our delight, till by turning we come ’round right.” The first verse is then repeated for dramatic emphasis. In doing so, the audience is further inspired by the singer’s words to embrace this lifestyle.

To allow an audience to more easily connect to the text, the melody is singable and relies mainly on stepwise motion, uses few leaps and employs a narrow range of an octave. Aaron Copland also sought to emphasize the message of simplicity of the text by using mainly a homophonic texture of long-held chords, only embracing the harmonic skeleton without any extra color as exemplified in measures three through nine. The nature of the chords in the left

hand are plain, utilizing open octaves that remain in the root position without including any colorful notes outside of the chord. While the chords are structurally simple, chord changes are syncopated, arriving an eighth note after the downbeat where the melody encourages a change in harmony. While one might think this is to add personality to the song, Copland utilized the syncopation to force a strictness of rhythm. Baritone, William Warfield states, "He wanted it simple, almost recitative-like in quality, so you wouldn't feel it as a rhythmic, bouncy thing... Aaron even put the chords on the off-accented beat to be sure it wouldn't be sung with that regular rhythmic feeling" (Copland Perlis 168). The syncopation shifts to the beat preceding the downbeat in the second verse, anticipating the chord change with largely the same objective in mind (mm. 13-16). Following this homophonic section, Copland then employs ostinato patterns in both the left and right hands to sustain the tonic chord over the melody as the text repeats the word "turn." The turning is represented by the repeated eighth note F's in measures seventeen through twenty-two. The first verse is then repeated above the syncopated homophonic accompaniment until the coda that fragments the melody in the left-hand, similar to the fragment of the prelude. This leads into a soft but strong perfect authentic cadence. The strategies employed by Copland in "Simple Gifts" leaves little to interpret between different performers, but this idea is emphasized thematically in the text. Adding musical flavor leads not to a simple life, and this arrangement represents the Shaker's beliefs perfectly.

Aaron Copland treated these American folk-songs with delicacy. He sought to provide music for a wide audience and found proper expression through a minimalistic approach which he applied to both his larger orchestral works as well as his more intimate arrangements. The integrity of the original folk melody is never lost in complex harmonies or counterpoint, and the emotion is drawn from a surface level, rather than a deeper, latent layer. In doing so, Aaron

Copland successfully crafted a classical American sound that a widely diverse people could call their own.

The arrangements of Aaron Copland and Benjamin Britten are equally as brilliant given the state of each country's current place in the classical world and the individual objectives each composer had during their careers. Benjamin Britten sought to restore the legacy of English music that had long since become stagnant following Henry Purcell. Instead of seeking a brand new sound, English Ballad composers were obsessed with commercial concerns rather than artistic beauty. Composers adopted techniques that were indistinguishable from their international counterparts which quickly became dry and exhausted. For centuries, English song suffered a monotonous fate that lasted until the beginning of the twentieth century with Benjamin Britten.

American music had simply not amalgamated into a singular classical form. While resources were abundant, listeners were not interested in the slowly-progressing American musical culture, but with perfect timing, Aaron Copland created an American sound reminiscent of the early American spirit through his compositions and support of other contemporary composers through music festivals.

The beauty of folk music is the simple, sentimental nature of a singable melody, and both Britten and Copland embraced this idea. In each of the songs analyzed, the melody remains unaltered. Thus the accompaniment, its relationship with the melody, and its treatment of the harmonic structure is what separates their music from each other and composers past. "Long Time Ago" and "The Ash Grove" are similar in that they both discuss love and loss, but the sentiments are expressed in two different ways. Aaron Copland does not stray from the diatonic nature of the song, creating a warmly reminiscent perspective on the subject. Britten begins this

way in "The Ash Grove," but uses harmonic changes in each verse to express different emotions involved in losing a loved one, including happiness of distant memories, despair over the realization of death and melancholy of helplessness. "Simple Gifts" and "The Miller of Dee" are contrasting in that the accompaniment of Copland's arrangement is completely passive while Britten's arrangement carries a heavy sub-text that distracts from the values of living a simple life. Had Britten's setting carried less dissonance, the values portrayed in each song could be more comparable.

It is possible to interact with the melody through counterpoint, although to use it is a delicate and deliberate technique. Aaron Copland uses a minimal amount of counterpoint in "Long Time Ago" and absolutely none in "Simple Gifts." This distracts the listener from the accompaniment so the melody alone is in the foreground. However, Benjamin Britten employs the imitative polyphonic structure in "The Ash Grove" to create a second character from the melody that serves as the memory of love and life passed.

Ostinato is another commonly used technique in both composers' works as demonstrated in "Long Time Ago" and "The Miller of Dee." However, these ostinato patterns serve different functions. Again, Copland uses repetitive notes to remove the accompaniment from the foreground so the listener can focus on the beauty of the melody (mm. 25-28) while Britten uses the pattern and dissonances involved to symbolically represent the turning of the mill and the passive-aggressive nature of the text. Syncopation is another rhythmic technique employed by both composers serving different purposes. Copland uses off-beat harmonic changes in "Simple Gifts" to keep a consistency of rhythm (mm. 4-6) while again Britten uses syncopated dissonances to add to the bitter sub-text of "The Miller of Dee" (mm. 18-21).

While Copland sought simplicity of sound, Britten sought depth and careful treatment of each element of his music. However, this is precisely what each composer needed to reinvigorate their respective audiences. Each composer provided a unique sound that attracted the ears of performers and concert-goers alike. *Old American Songs* is a collection of folk tunes reminiscent of simpler times as colonists settled in a new land and began to explore the Western Frontier. The settings represent this simplicity in the delicate harmonic structure, largely homophonic texture and expansive accompanimental range. Benjamin Britten's folk song arrangements look beyond the sentimentality of the folk tune to find a deeper meaning behind the text. The dynamic harmonic structures, meticulous counterpoint and symbolic accompanimental figures created not simply colors, but a finely detailed, emotional portrait. Each composer had his own personal intention of the styles employed, but the common denominator for each composer was the inclusion of folk elements in their works, and this led both composers to a new national sound that both countries could claim as their own.

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