

## ***Fanfare for the Common Man*—Aaron Copland**

For the 1942-43 concert season, the distinguished English conductor of the Cincinnati Symphonic, Eugene Goossens, conceived the idea of commissioning fanfares from mostly American composers to open each of the forthcoming concerts. Those were dark times, indeed, for the world's democracies, and he sought to more or less repeat his success with a similar project in England during the First World War. The subsequent eighteen fanfares were written by many luminaries of the American music world at that time, and they vary significantly in musical style—and lasting success. The list of those to whom the various works were dedicated may seem a bit curious to us today, but they do reflect somewhat the unfocused—some would say naïve—conception of the task ahead as America went to war. I've examined them in manuscript at the Philadelphia Free Library, and all of them are eloquent, earnest responses to the world at hand. Some titles seem prosaic: *Fanfare for the Signal Corps* by Howard Hanson; some seem ambiguous: *A Fanfare for Friends* by Daniel Gregory Mason; and some a bit optimistic: *A Fanfare for the Fighting French* by Walter Piston. But only one has survived on concert programs—and everywhere else—and become a defining icon of America's self perception.

Aaron Copland was a committed populist during the 1930s—his enormously successful works from that time certainly bear that out—and what better dedicatee for a man of his persuasion than the “common man?” And for that matter, what better inspiration for the idea than the words of the Vice-President, Henry A. Wallace? Wallace, a controversial, but sincere, advocate of left-wing social and political views had given an important speech—and later entitled a book—with the phrase, “*century of the common man*,” and Copland, given his political orientation, would certainly have found resonance in the thought. That it bore fruit in the composer's psyche is self-evident.

Scored for the brass and percussion sections alone, its granite-like octaves and unisons, and open “American Sound” harmonies, punctuated by stentorian utterances from the percussion have assumed an unprecedented life in our musical culture. Even when alluded to abstractly by the legions of composers who have sought the feeling and sound of this remarkably concise work—we “know” instinctively what is being invoked. Copland knew that he had a gem on his hands, and soon used a version of the fanfare as the main theme of the last movement in one of his most important works, the Symphony No. 3. The latter work—first performed in 1946—was openly characterized by the composer as reflective of America's mood, having triumphed over an overwhelming challenge to its very existence. Seldom does art and popular feeling coalesce in such profound unanimity. The fanfare is now a national treasure.

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