

INSTRUMENTATION AND ORCHESTRATION IN
AARON COPLAND'S APPALACHIAN SPRING SUITE SCORES

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It is one thing to state that a composer or arranger might rescore a completed work for a wholly different ensemble, but it is another to explore what specific tasks and techniques are involved in such a rescoring. The latter is the relevant topic for the instruction of other composers and arrangers. Therefore, this paper will seek to explore the differences in instrumentation, voicing, and techniques between the “13-Instrument” (or chamber version) and “symphonic” scores of Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring* Suite.

While it is commonly known that Copland composed *Appalachian Spring* as a ballet, a brief history of the commission and composition will assist in understanding the journey to the two scores being studied in this paper.

Choreographer Martha Graham had proposed a commission for Copland as early as 1941, which he declined. In 1942 patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge became involved in the process and the result was a double commission for Graham’s Dance Company. Offering \$500 each, one score was to be from Copland and the other from Carlos Chávez with the intent that they be premiered on the same program. The commission specified that the works be approximately 30 minutes in duration and scored for “a chamber orchestration for no more than twelve musicians”.¹

¹ Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland; The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999). 391.

The collaboration between Graham and Copland is a topic worthy of a different study, but their work resulted in a completed piano score from which Graham choreographed the ballet, “not hearing the orchestration until a week before the premiere”² on October 30th, 1944.

“In May 1945 Copland arranged an orchestral suite of music from the ballet. He principally omitted one large eight-minute section... In addition, Copland made a few smaller cuts elsewhere in the score and reordered the variations on ‘Simple Gifts’ [a familiar Shaker Tune].”³

“The suite’s popularity led to still other versions and arrangements, including an orchestrated version of the complete score in 1954, so that Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra could accompany a performance by the Graham Company.”⁴

In all, there are five versions of *Appalachian Spring*: “the original ballet score for chamber group, a revised version of the complete ballet for both orchestra and chamber group, and a suite for both orchestra and chamber group.”⁵ Additionally Copland prepared both band and orchestra offerings of *Variations on a Shaker Tune* making the most of the popularity of the *Simple Gifts* tune.

While Copland had conceived the original ballet score for double string quartet and piano, he added double bass, flute, clarinet and bassoon for a total of 13 players. This decision came “in part because he knew these instruments would be on hand for the

² Marta Robertson, “Musical and Choreographic Integration in Copland's and Graham's "Appalachian Spring",” *The Musical Quarterly* (Oxford University Press) 83, no. 1 (1999): 8.

³ Pollack, 404.

⁴ *Ibid*, 405.

⁵ *Ibid*.

Chávez.”⁶ The later orchestral suite would be scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, trumpets, and trombones, along with percussion, harp, piano, and strings.

Obvious differences in the instrumentation of these scores, even without listening, are the possibilities afforded through the availability of full sections of strings as well as the addition of brass and percussion sections. Three notable subtleties, however, also come through 1.) the added availability of oboes for solo and duet work, 2.) the retention of the piano in the orchestral texture, and 3.) the addition of the harp, which is never called upon for its signature glissandi, but, rather, offers simple texture ranging from single pitches and 3-octave unison whole notes to more acrobatic rhythms reminiscent of a dulcimer.

Copland employs several strategies in the task of expanding the score. A complete list of the changes, organized by measure numbers, can found in Appendix #1. This discussion, however, will summarize some of the common and most effective techniques used by the composer, namely those of elimination, replacement, overlapping, and expansion.

In the chamber version of the suite the violins, flute, and clarinet are often called upon for support of one another for strength of section, especially when one voice is “pulled out” for solo purposes. When these same passages are approached with the full orchestra in mind, there is no such need for support of the harmonic structure or balance. Therefore, some material can be eliminated altogether.

⁶ *Ibid*, 392.

Copland's technique of elimination is seen in the opening measures of the suite where, in m. 6, the flute is used to reinforce the movement in the violins. (see Example 1). The orchestral version of m. 6 shows an identical scoring of the strings. There is, however, no reinforcement of this line. In fact, only half the players of each string section are called upon to play. The natural reinforcement comes from having section strings, creating plenty of sound for this light, ethereal texture for the opening.

Example 1: Chamber Score (m. 6)

While the above example of elimination, removing the woodwind reinforcement, is simply textural, there are also instances where Copland chooses to eliminate an idea that is not otherwise replaced, leaving the remaining material to stand on its own strength.

This concept is found in m. 115 (see Examples 2a and 2b) and following by eliminating the string material, and again by eliminating the woodwind material from mm. 121-122.

Example 2a: Chamber Score (m. 115)

Example 2b: Symphonic Score (m. 115)

In both scores melodic and counter-melodic lines are often rescored to other instruments with only Copland's desired textures guiding the selection. This type of replacement is a commonly used technique yielding many examples from these scores. One such example can be found in mm. 22-26 where the clarinet material is moved to the Trumpet, Violin to the Oboe, Piano to the Harp, Bassoon to the Horn, and Cello to Bassoon (See Examples 3a and 3b).

B♭ Cl. *mp*

Bsn. *mp*

Pno. *mp*

Vln. *p*

Vln. *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Example 3a: Chamber Score (m. 22-26)

Ob. *p*

A Cl.1

A Cl.2

Bsn. *p*

2 Hns. Senza sord.

2 B. Tpts. *mp*

Hp. *mp*

Vln. *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Example 3b: Symphonic Score (m. 22-26)

The chamber score utilizes the piano for texture, support, and as a solo instrument. As a general rule, in the orchestral scoring, solo piano melodic lines are replaced with another option based on the surrounding texture. One such instance is found in mm. 98-101, where the first phrase is re-voiced while the second retains its original instrumentation in the woodwinds.

Copland utilizes this technique of replacement not only for solo melodic material, but also for the textures of entire instrumental sections. A major shifting of texture is found in mm. 299-302 where the material for the woodwind section is given to the string section, the piano's material to the woodwinds, and in m. 303 material from both the woodwinds and piano appear in the symphonic brass section. This movement of material between entire sections or sub-sections (i.e. flutes/violins instead of woodwinds/strings) is somewhat common for Copland in this project.

Another technique that is afforded by the instrumentation of the larger orchestra is the benefit of overlapping segments and phrases. In mm. 220-224 the chamber score shows a dialogue of lines between the clarinet and flute culminating in m. 224 with stacking rhythms in flute, clarinet, bassoon and viola. Sorting the passages in the orchestral version of the same measures yields no new results except that the "added" rhythmic values facilitate breaks and overlaps in the lines which add interest and assist making the smooth transitions between the sounding of the various instruments. (See examples 4a and 4b).

Example 4a: Chamber Score (m. 220-224)

Example 4b: Symphonic Score (m. 220-224)

As Copland rescoring from 13 instruments to the full orchestra, it is expected that one technique used would be that of expansion. Five types of expansion are used in the *Appalachian Spring* conversion, and they can be grouped into two categories: doubling and adding of new or different elements.

Doubling is a time-honored practice of expansion in the technique of orchestration, and is a reasonable choice here. The doubling occurs in single-line and single-instrument situations, such as m. 74 where violin I is doubled by the horns and in

m. 76 where the violas are doubled by the trumpets. Doubling also occurs, however, within sections, particularly the woodwinds, to add depth to an otherwise thinner texture. This type of section doubling requires careful voicing to take full advantage of the added oboes as well as the paired flutes, clarinets, and bassoons (see Examples 5a and 5b).

This musical score shows three staves for woodwinds in a chamber score setting, measures 80-81. The staves are labeled 'Fl.' (Flute), 'B♭ Cl.' (B-flat Clarinet), and 'Bsn.' (Bassoon). All three instruments play a half note in measure 80, marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and an accent (>). In measure 81, each instrument plays a half note, also marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and an accent (>). A slur connects the notes across the two measures for each part. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Example 5a: Chamber Score (m. 80-81, woodwinds)

This musical score shows six staves for woodwinds in a symphonic score setting, measures 80-81. The staves are labeled 'Fl. 1', 'Fl. 2', 'Ob.' (Oboe), 'A Cl. 1' (Alto Clarinet 1), 'A Cl. 2' (Alto Clarinet 2), and 'Bsn.' (Bassoon). All six instruments play a half note in measure 80, marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and an accent (>). In measure 81, each instrument plays a half note, also marked with a forte (*ff*) dynamic and an accent (>). A slur connects the notes across the two measures for each part. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Example 5b: Symphonic Score (m. 80-81, Woodwinds)

Copland also expands the orchestration with the changing and/or addition of rhythms (i.e. mm. 123-124 in the flutes, 221-223 in the woodwinds, and 421-424 in the trumpets), sustained notes (mm. 134-136/violin I, 434-435/woodwinds and piano), or the

addition of new material (m. 435ff). In some cases, the addition of sustained notes forces the re-voicing of a section and creates an overlap as found in mm. 135-138.

In addition to these scoring and orchestration techniques, Copland makes two revisions to the score's framework. At m. 390 the chamber score has a time signature of "common time" while the symphonic score has a time signature of "cut time". The rhythmic notation stays the same between the scores. Similarly, the chamber score has a key signature of Db at m. 411 while the symphonic version has a key signature of C. The actual pitches remain unchanged through the use of accidentals. This change of key signature prevents the additional key change to C at m. 421 as is found in the chamber score.

With this amount of so-called revision, is the new suite for orchestra an arrangement? Or is it a composition? The answer is probably best found in the history itself. The "original" score was a piano score for rehearsal. Everything from that point, regardless of the work's conception, has been an expansion. Some listeners and critics have appreciated the expansion to full orchestra while others prefer the chamber version. After the expansion to full orchestra for the suite, Copland received many requests to release the suite with *Appalachian Spring's* original, smaller instrumentation. Copland resisted this type of reverse engineering stating, "When the sound of the full orchestra is so present in people's minds, I feel certain it can only suffer by comparison."⁷ Eventually he complied releasing the original 13-voice instrumentation with the content cuts of the suite, but, doing so, also gave permission to add string players for added texture. Late in life Copland stated, "I have come to think that the original

⁷ Pollack, 405.

instrumentation has a clarity and is closer to my original conception than the more opulent orchestrated version.”⁸

⁸ *Ibid*, 406.

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