



COPLAND

Billy the Kid
(Complete Ballet)

Grohg
(One-Act Ballet)

Detroit Symphony Orchestra

Leonard Slatkin



Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Grohg · Billy the Kid

Grohg (1925)

As much as anyone, Copland, who was born in 1900 in Brooklyn, and died in 1990 in Tarrytown (now Sleepy Hollow), New York, established American concert music through his works and his tireless efforts on its behalf. He and his contemporaries not only raised this music to a very high standard of professional excellence, but put it on an equal footing with contemporary developments in Europe. Igor Stravinsky put it into perspective when he said, "Why call Copland a great American composer? He is a great composer, period." In Paris in the early 1920s, Copland studied with the renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger, who not only had an encyclopedic knowledge of music, but was one of the first women to conduct a major orchestra. In the summer of 1922 Boulanger thought it was time for Copland to attempt an orchestral work, so after showing her a few piano sketches, she suggested that he expand them into a full-length ballet, mainly because of the great popularity and influence of the stage works which Sergei Diaghilev and his Russian ballet company had at the time. One of Copland's close friends in those days was the American writer and critic Harold Clurman, and the two of them were fond of the cinema, at that time still a silent medium. In Copland's own words:

"One evening in the fall of 1922 we went to see the popular German horror film *Nosferatu*. It was about a vampire magician with the power to make corpses come to life ... by the time we reached home that night I decided that this bizarre tale would be the basis for my ballet. Harold had never written a scenario, but he was eager to try. At first we called it *Le Necromancien* ('The Necromancer'); the title *Grohg* was chosen later. This ballet became the most ambitious undertaking of my Paris years: I had no choreographer, commission or contact with a major ballet company. Nevertheless, I wrote this

for the big time: a one-act, 35-minute ballet for full pit orchestra plus piano. There was a taste for the bizarre at the time, and if *Grohg* sounds morbid and excessive, the music was meant to be fantastic rather than ghastly. Also, the need for gruesome effects gave me an excuse for 'modern' rhythms and dissonances. Until *Grohg*, I had written only short piano pieces using jazz-derived rhythms. Now I was translating those techniques into a larger framework. In 1924 before I left Paris, [Boulanger] and I played *Grohg* for piano four hands at a farewell party at her apartment. I revised the ballet in 1932, but did not release it for publication ... I arranged the introductory *Cortège macabre* as a separate work, and it thereby became my earliest orchestra piece."

Soon after returning to the US, Copland submitted the *Cortège macabre* to Howard Hanson for possible use in the first of the American Composers Concerts. Out of almost 50 pieces submitted, Copland's score became one of six selected for performance by the Eastman Philharmonia in May 1925, a concert which received national attention. Two years later Copland withdrew the work from his catalogue, but in 1971 when Hanson wanted to perform it again in a concert marking the last Festival of American Music, Copland agreed, saying, "... if Hanson liked it, there must be something good about it!"

Friedrich Murnau's (1888–1931) brilliantly eerie and imaginative silent expressionist masterpiece *Nosferatu* is a very free adaptation of Bram Stoker's famous novel *Dracula*. This cinematic revision of the Stoker original had to be done mainly due to copyright considerations, and one of its plot devices is an explanation for the outbreak of bubonic plague which occurred in Bremen, Germany in 1838. Copland and Clurman further adapted the film to their own ends, making the central character "... a sorcerer who loves the dead and tries in vain to have their affection. He can make them dance as long as he does

not touch them." They described Grohg as having large, piercing eyes and a hooked nose, who was "... tragic and pitiable in his ugliness." For what is essentially a student work, Copland's score is quite amazing, and on hearing parts of it which were rearranged into the *Dance Symphony* of 1929, Stravinsky called it "a very precocious opus" for a young man then in his early 20s. There are many influences on the ballet, among them Mussorgsky, Satie, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Schmitt, along with jazz and Jewish music, but it is still very much early Copland. In spite of Copland's having withdrawn the ballet, the English composer and conductor Oliver Knussen (1952–2018) came across the 1932 revision which he championed in the 1990s, giving the work its first performance in 1992 with the London Sinfonietta, and then recording it with the Cleveland Orchestra the following year. When finally exposed to this more or less original version, critics were unanimous in their praise of what they regarded as a truly remarkable find.

The ballet is divided into six sections which are played without a pause:

1. Introduction and Cortège – Entrance of Grohg

There is a slow, moody introduction, followed by the bearers of coffins. The dance of the coffin bearers reaches a climax as Grohg the sorcerer enters, and the dancers pay homage to him.

2. Dance of the Adolescent

Grohg revives the corpse of an adolescent who becomes terrified by the sorcerer after dancing with him. Grohg then violently strikes down the adolescent.

3. Dance of the Opium-Eater (Visions of Jazz)

Grohg next revives the corpse of an opium addict. The addict dances to a jazzy tune, but then Grohg takes pity on the addict and removes the magic which brought him back to life. The opium-eater is then returned to his coffin.

4. Dance of the Street-Walker

The corpse of a street-walker is then revived, and she does a dance which arouses Grohg's passions. He tries to embrace the woman, but there is a struggle and she, too, is struck down.

5. Grohg Imagines the Dead Are Mocking Him

Grohg begins to hallucinate and imagines that corpses are making fun of him and violently striking him. Nevertheless, he joins in their dances. Chaos ensues, then Grohg raises the street-walker over his head and throws her into the crowd.

6. Illumination and Disappearance of Grohg

The stage turns dark except for a light focused on Grohg's head, and he slowly disappears to music which echoes the gloomy music at the beginning of the ballet.

Billy the Kid (1938)

In the 1930s, Copland realized that he and his fellow composers needed to communicate with a large and receptive audience rather than a small and esoteric one, and in his case, try to convey what he had to say in the simplest possible terms. The results of this new "Americanized" direction were remarkable, and in a short time Copland had developed a popular and easily assimilated style which incorporated indigenous folk materials and was appealing to a mass audience, yet at the same time retained a sophistication from his earlier works. The first major result of this new style was the 1938 ballet *Billy the Kid*, which continued the 20th century's preoccupation with ballet. In this, and his two subsequent ballets, *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring*, he uniquely and convincingly captured the spirit of the times, and the nation's ideal of "everyman." *Billy the Kid* is entirely American in its story, compositional style and orchestration: simple harmonies are highlighted by a bright, brassy sound, and a large percussion section often plays syncopated rhythms. At a time when most European and many American composers were writing atonal and very thorny works, Copland began to produce works which were tonal and based on simple, basic chords – chords which happened to be the basis of most guitar accompaniments to folk and cowboy songs, such as the (mostly) familiar tunes found in this delightful ballet. He also achieved the amazing feat of writing music which seems simple, but is at the same time inventive and rhythmically complex. *Billy the Kid* was actually not the

first score to use American folk music in a symphonic setting. Charles Ives (1874–1954) had been using folk and popular music in his unique and often perplexing works since before the turn of the 19th century. The big difference here is that, at the time, Ives' music was known only to a small group of people working outside the musical mainstream. With his three wonderful ballets, however, Copland inspired a great deal of folk-flavored compositions from his peers.

In 1933, a young poet named Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996) and a former Harvard classmate named Edward Warburg (1908–1992) created a dance company called the American Ballet – a very risky venture at the time. It was successful, however, because both of these young men were intelligent and ambitious, and possessed of considerable personal wealth. Kirstein was even able to attract George Balanchine (1904–1983) to come from Paris to oversee the company and its dance school. It survived through the Great Depression as a training ground for young dancers, from 1935 to 1938 as a resident company for the Metropolitan Opera, and from 1936 to 1941 as the Ballet Caravan. In 1946 Balanchine and Kirstein re-formed the company as the Ballet Society, and in 1948 it became the New York City Ballet. Kirstein's goal was a uniquely American ballet which would use native settings and movements, and he came closest to achieving these goals during the years of the Ballet Caravan. During those five years he assembled a remarkable group of young American choreographers, artists and composers, and commissioned a series of one-act ballets on American themes, culminating in Copland's *Billy the Kid*, which came about as the result of an inspired collaboration between Copland and choreographer Eugene Loring (1911–1982) (born LeRoy Kerpestein), based on the life of the legendary 19th-century outlaw. Walter Noble Burns' bestseller *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, a compelling mixture of historical research and legend, was the primary source of information at the time, and it is reported that early in 1938 Kirstein gave Loring a copy of the book with the admonition, "Read it and try to get a ballet out of it." Although Loring initially had misgivings about turning the book into a ballet, and

Copland was wary of the whole idea of a cowboy ballet, what eventually won over the collaborators was Burns' compelling rendering of the bare historical facts into a transitional study of adolescence to manhood, and frontier wilderness to modern society, with Billy as a symbol of lost innocence, whose frontier exploits must be stamped out by an ever-changing world. Loring created some remarkable and novel choreography for *Billy*, in the process incorporating film techniques such as flashback, flash-forward and slow motion. The ballet had its premiere in a two-piano version in Chicago in October 1938, with Loring dancing the title role, and a young dancer in a minor role named Jerome Robbins, who would go on to have a most distinguished career. The New York production, with full orchestra, premiered in May 1939, and was a smash hit with both the public and the critics, including a highly favorable review that June in *Time* magazine. Loring recalled: "*Billy* was my most successful work; it was a hit from the start and was danced all over South America with great success. It was the first full-fledged American ballet in style, form and content, and was the prototype for the later 'Western' ballets of DeMille, Robbins and others that would become American classics." Copland, too, had positive memories of this ballet, saying: "I cannot remember another work of mine that was so unanimously well received." Kirstein also had a great fondness for Copland, saying: "Aaron was different about music for the dance than other composers: he took it more seriously and recognized the challenge of translating into sound what one sees on the stage."

The infamous outlaw known as "Billy the Kid" was born William Henry McCarty in November 1859 in Manhattan, and died in July 1881 in Fort Sumner, New Mexico Territory. He was only 21 at the time of his death. At the height of his notoriety he adopted the name "William H. Bonney", but for most of his lifetime was virtually unknown. It was only in the early part of 1881 that his exploits became legend, when Lew Wallace, governor of the New Mexico Territory, placed a price on his head for his part in the bloody Lincoln County War. Wallace, a lawyer, Union general in the American Civil War, statesman, politician and author, was governor of the

New Mexico Territory at the time of the war, and was largely responsible for bringing an end to the fighting. While serving as governor, Wallace completed his second novel, *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*. It made him famous, became the best-selling American novel of the 19th century (even surpassing Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), has never been out of print, and has been adapted for film no less than four times.

Like many gunfighters of the old West, Billy enjoyed a reputation based largely on exaggerated accounts of his exploits, but his activity in the Lincoln County War effectively precluded his receiving any kind of amnesty from Governor Wallace, who had been ordered by President Hayes to get rid of the outlaws. Billy was indeed killed by sheriff Pat Garrett after his murderous escape from the Lincoln County courthouse in July of 1881.

This album presents the entire score of the ballet, whose action is best summed up in the preface to the full score:

"The action begins and closes on the open prairie. Billy is seen for the first time as a boy of twelve with his mother. A brawl turns ugly, guns are drawn, and in some unaccountable way Billy's mother is killed. Without an instant's hesitation, in cold fury, Billy draws a knife from a cowhand's sheath and stabs his mother's slayers ... In swift succession we see episodes in Billy's later life: at night, under the stars, in a quiet card game with his outlaw friends, hunted by a posse led by his former friend Pat Garrett. A running gun battle ensues, and Billy is captured, after which a drunken celebration takes place. Billy in prison is, of course, followed by one of his legendary escapes. Tired and worn out in the desert, Billy rests with his girl. Starting from a deep sleep, he senses movement in the shadows. The posse has finally caught up with him."

Charles Greenwell

Detroit Symphony Orchestra



The Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) is known for trailblazing performances, collaborations with internationally renowned artists, and a deep connection to its city. Conductor Leonard Slatkin, who recently concluded a decade-long tenure at the helm, now serves as the DSO's Music Director Laureate, endowed by The Kresge Foundation. Conductor, arranger, and trumpeter Jeff Tyzik is the orchestra's Principal Pops Conductor, while trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard holds the Fred A. and Barbara M. Erb Jazz Creative Director Chair. Situated at the historic Orchestra Hall within the Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, the DSO offers a varied performance schedule, as well as the William Davidson Neighborhood Concert Series, and a robust schedule of eclectic multi-genre performances in its mid-size venue The Cube, constructed and curated with support from Peter D. and Julie F. Cummings. A dedication to broadcast innovation began in 1922, when the DSO became the first orchestra in the world to present a radio broadcast and continues today with the free Live from Orchestra Hall webcast series, which also reaches tens of thousands of children with the Classroom Edition expansion.

www.dso.org

Leonard Slatkin



Internationally acclaimed conductor Leonard Slatkin is Music Director Laureate of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) and Directeur Musical Honoraire of the Orchestre National de Lyon (ONL). He maintains a rigorous schedule of guest conducting throughout the world and is active as a composer, author, and educator. Highlights of the 2018–19 season include a tour of Germany with the ONL, a three-week American Festival with the DSO, the Kastalsky *Requiem* project commemorating the World War I Centennial, Penderecki's 85th birthday celebration in Warsaw, five weeks in Asia leading orchestras in Guangzhou, Beijing, Osaka, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, and the Manhattan School of Music's 100th anniversary gala concert at Carnegie Hall. He will also conduct the Moscow Philharmonic, the Balearic Islands Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Louisville Orchestra, the Berner Symphonieorchester, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo. Slatkin has received six GRAMMY® Awards and 33 nominations. His recent Naxos recordings include works by Saint-Saëns, Ravel, and Berlioz (with the ONL) and music by Copland, Rachmaninov, Borzova, McTee, and John Williams (with the DSO). In addition, he has recorded the complete Brahms, Beethoven, and Tchaikovsky symphonies with the DSO (available online as digital downloads). A recipient of the prestigious National Medal of Arts, Slatkin also holds the rank of Chevalier in the French Legion of Honor. He has received Austria's Decoration of Honor in Silver, the League of American Orchestras' Gold Baton Award, and the 2013 ASCAP Deems Taylor Special Recognition Award for his debut book, *Conducting Business*. His second book, *Leading Tones: Reflections on Music, Musicians, and the Music Industry*, was published by Amadeus Press in 2017. Slatkin has conducted virtually all the leading orchestras in the world. As Music Director, he has held posts in New Orleans, St. Louis, Washington, DC, London (with the BBC Symphony Orchestra), Detroit, and Lyon. He has also served as Principal Guest Conductor in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Cleveland.

www.leonardslatkin.com

Aaron
COPLAND
(1900–1990)

Grohg (One-Act Ballet) (1925) 29:35

1. Introduction and Cortège – Entrance of Grohg – 7:55
2. Dance of the Adolescent – 6:20
3. Dance of the Opium-Eater (Visions of Jazz) – 3:40
4. Dance of the Street-Walker – 4:31
5. Grohg Imagines the Dead Are Mocking Him – 5:00
6. Illumination and Disappearance of Grohg 2:04

**Billy the Kid
(Complete Ballet) (1938) 33:14**

7. Introduction: The Open Prairie 3:17
8. Street in a Frontier Town 3:18
9. Mexican Dance and Finale 7:07
10. Prairie Night (Card Game at Night) –
Billy Cheats Garrett at Cards – They Quarrel 3:39
11. Gun Battle – Billy is Captured by Garrett,
Turned Sheriff 2:34
12. Celebration 3:00
13. Billy in Prison – Murder of the Prison Guard
and Escape 1:40
14. Billy in the Desert: Waltz 3:46
15. Billy's Death 1:09
16. Billy's Funeral: Mourning Mexicans 1:24
17. The Open Prairie Again 2:21

**Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Leonard Slatkin**

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by Ben Wittick (1845–1903)



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Aaron Copland did as much as anyone in establishing American concert music on the world stage, and his ballet scores proved to be among his most important and influential works. *Grohg* is the most ambitious example of his Parisian years, a precociously brilliant one-act ballet scored for full orchestra, inspired by the silent expressionist film *Nosferatu*. The first example of Copland's new 'Americanized' music of the 1930s was *Billy the Kid*, based on the life of the 19th-century outlaw and heard here in its full version. This was the first fully fledged American ballet in style and content: brassy, syncopated, filmic and richly folk-flavored.

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Playing
Time:
62:54