

Welcome back, music enthusiasts, to another episode of Busy Kids Love Music, the podcast where we explore the fascinating world of classical music and make it fun and accessible for our young listeners. I'm your host, Carly Seifert, and today we're diving into the second part of our three-part series on the incredible composer, Aaron Copland, and his iconic ballets: Billy the Kid, Rodeo, and Appalachian Spring.

In our last episode, we delved into the life of Aaron Copland and discussed his early influences and the inspiration behind his music. Today, we're shifting our focus to some of his ballet masterpieces. Let's start with "Billy the Kid."

"Billy the Kid" was composed in 1938, and it's one of Copland's most celebrated works. It tells the story of the infamous American outlaw, Billy the Kid, in a way that captures the spirit of the Wild West. The music incorporates folk tunes and cowboy songs, creating a vivid sonic landscape that brings the Old West to life. The opening song is called "The Open Prairie." Can you picture the rising sun over the western desert as you hear this music being played?

The ballet is divided into several sections, each depicting a different aspect of Billy's life. From the open prairies to the bustling saloons, Copland's score paints a picture of the American frontier. Listen to this scene of a gun battle. The higher pitched snare drum represents Billy, and the sheriff and his posse are represented by kettle drums.

Later in life, Copland expressed regrets about using Billy the Kid – who was an outlaw and a criminal – for his subject. Nevertheless, conflict was an inseparable part of life in the Wild West, and Copland's music certainly captures that in this ballet.

Moving on to our next featured ballet, we have "Rodeo." Composed in 1942, "Rodeo" is another one of Copland's masterpieces that captures the essence of American folk culture. It takes us to the heart of the American Southwest, where the rhythmic sounds of hooves and lively folk tunes intertwine.

In "Rodeo," Copland introduces us to the lively world of a ranch and the excitement of a rodeo. The music is energetic, playful, and full of character, making it a favorite for audiences of all ages. The story takes place at Burnt Ranch, where a cowgirl competes with visiting city girls for the attention of the local cowboys. The piece you're listening to now is one of the most beloved from the ballet and is called "Hoe-Down". There are two square-dance tunes that Copland borrows for this piece, which ends triumphantly as the Cowgirl gets the right guy for her – not the stuck-up Head Wrangler after all, but another cowboy who has treated her with respect and kindness.

As we listen to the spirited melodies and rhythmic dance tunes, it's clear that Copland had a unique ability to capture the spirit of the American West in his music, isn't it?

Finally, let's explore Copland's "Appalachian Spring."

Premiered in 1944, this ballet is perhaps one of his most beloved compositions. Unlike the previous ballets, "Appalachian Spring" moves away from the Wild West theme, taking us to the serene hills of Pennsylvania.

The ballet tells the story of a newlywed couple building a home in the Appalachian Mountains. Copland's music is tender and contemplative, reflecting the beauty and simplicity of everyday life. The ballet won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1945, and contains some of Copland's most familiar music. Perhaps you recognize the section we're listening to now, because it also contains Copland's set of variations on the popular Shaker hymn, "Simple Gifts".

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The characters in this ballet include a revivalist preacher, pioneer woman, young couple to be married and the preacher's followers. It was commissioned by a wealthy patron of the arts who requested a new ballet for the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who specialized in choreographing modern dance works.

We've explored three distinct ballets by Aaron Copland in today's episode: "Billy the Kid," "Rodeo," and "Appalachian Spring." Each ballet has its own unique charm, showcasing Copland's versatility as a composer. Head over to this episode's show notes at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/114 where I've put together a curated playlist on YouTube of some of the most famous songs and movements from these 3 ballets of Aaron Copland. You'll love hearing and seeing these performances or having them on in the background as you do other activities throughout your week. Again you can find the link to that playlist at busykidsdopiano.com/podcast/114.

That concludes part two of our series on Aaron Copland. Join me next time for the final installment, where we'll explore Copland's work "Fanfare for the Common Man." Until then, keep listening, keep learning, and keep loving music. Bye for now!