

# Meridian Music of the Week!

## Issue No. 203 (based on previous Newsletter No.164 – September 2024)

Each week ALL our children will be listening to a piece of music as part of our music lessons. We'll be talking about it in class and discussing what we like, what we don't like and what it makes us think about. Parents/carers/family - why not join in and listen for yourself at home! All music is available **free** on YouTube as well as paid services such as iTunes and Spotify.

### This week's music...



### 'Hoedown' from the ballet 'Rodeo' by Aaron Copland (1942)

Excellent BBC version with commentary by Lemn Sissay [HERE](#)

Watch Aaron Copland conduct the piece himself [HERE](#)

Compare it to Copland's 'El Salón México' [HERE](#)

'Prog-Rock' version by Emerson, Lake & Palmer (!) [HERE](#)

Quite a good Rock version from Mr. Big, live in Japan [HERE](#)

### Music from the wild, wild west!

Well, howdy pardners! Yee-ha! This week we have a piece of American music from one of the United States' greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century composers – Aaron Copland. He was famous for writing music that made the listener imagine the wild west of America. Copland was a great influence on composers who wrote music for film scores. If you've ever watched a western movie with Cowboys and Indians, gunfights and dancing in the local saloon, then you will have probably heard the kind of music Copland liked to compose.

### Aaron Copland

Copland was very much a twentieth century composer. He was born in New York in 1900 and died in 1990 (he had the same birthday as me!) He was the youngest of five children and was taught to play the piano by his older sister Laurine who went to the New York opera school. Unlike many other famous composers Copland didn't start writing music until he was in his teens.



Aaron Copland conducting.

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He studied in Paris for three years and hung out with many other famous composers that we've looked at in our previous newsletters such as Igor Stravinsky (who wrote '[The Firebird](#)') and Camille Saint-Saëns (who wrote '[The Carnival of Animals](#)'). But Copland came back to America in the 1920s. His 'best' time was during the 1940s when he wrote most of his famous musical pieces – including music for many movies. In fact, one of his movie scores won an Oscar award. One of his most famous pieces of music from this time was '[Fanfare for the Common Man](#)' (which you can listen to [HERE](#)) and is still, to this day, played during the celebrations for new American Presidents (known as an 'inauguration').

But, in the 1960s he gave up composing music and switched to conducting orchestras. People asked him why he stopped writing music and he simply said that he had run out of new ideas! He said it was like "[...someone had simply turned off the tap](#)".

### Three Aaron Copland Fun Facts!



1. He thought his own face was so 'funny looking' (with a narrow face, long nose and droopy eyelids) that he used to say he looked like a giraffe!

2. Copland was scared of heights!

3. He never used to write music during the day, he always waited until after dinner and worked until midnight or even later!

### 'Hoedown'...

This week's piece of music is a short section from a much longer ballet called 'Rodeo'. A 'Hoedown' is the name for an American social gathering where people danced in a cowboy style. The ballet is set in the wild west of America and the dancing for the ballet was choreographed by a famous American dancer Agnes de Mille. But strangely, when it was first performed, most of the other dancers were actually Russian!

The tune of 'Hoedown' wasn't really originally by Copland though. It was 'borrowed' from an old folk-tune for the violin called 'Bonaparte's Retreat' (you can listen to an old 1937 version of it [HERE](#)). This tune was written in the 1800s and celebrated the retreat of Napoleon Bonaparte from Moscow in 1812 – remember last week's newsletter on Tchaikovsky?



A cowboy riding a bull at a rodeo.

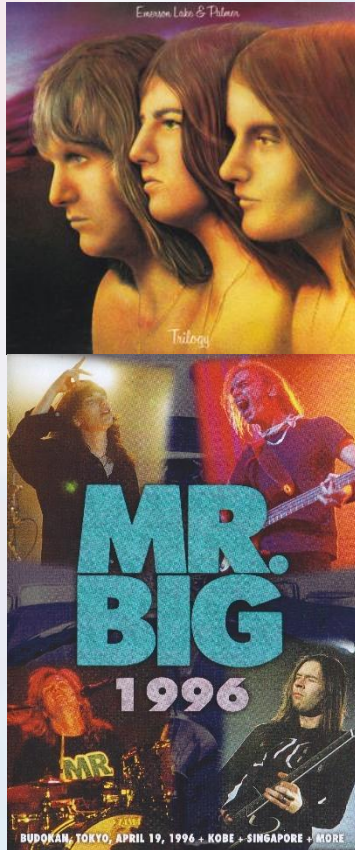
The 'story' of the ballet is all about a rodeo - a contest for cowboys where they show their skills at riding bucking broncos, wrestling steers and throwing lassos. The hoedown was the social dance that took place at the end of the competition. But at the rodeo, one of the cowboys is actually a girl in disguise! She wants to join in the competition to show off her skills – but the head wrangler ignores her and doesn't let her join the contest.

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However, in the evening at the final hoedown, she turns up to the dance wearing a dress. The head wrangler finally recognises who she is. He slowly walks over to her and looks like he's going to kiss her. But she says 'No!' and goes off to dance with one of the cowboys (who had actually been friendly to her earlier on) instead!

The music itself makes a lot of use of brass instruments (particularly **trumpets**) and loads of **percussion** (wood blocks, snare drum and **xylophone**). The **tempo** (speed) of the music is mostly quite fast – but it does slow down every now and then.



## Some other places you can hear the music...

'Hoedown' is such a popular tune that it appears in lots of different places. Progressive rock band Emerson, Lake & Palmer recorded a version of it in 1972 (listen [HERE](#)) as well as by a band called Mr. Big hear it live [HERE](#) and it was used in a series of American TV adverts for beef! (watch some annoying American children [HERE](#)!) It was perhaps most famously used as part of the opening ceremony of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City (you can see it [HERE](#)).

So, get your cowboy hat on, and dance along to the music!

Listen and enjoy!

Mr. Mole

Music teacher

