Article

The Right Opera at the Wrong Time: *The Tender Land*, Aaron Copland, and the Red Scare

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ABSTRACT

Aaron Copland's only full-length opera, *The Tender Land* has had a difficult production history. Critics of the 1954 New York City Opera Premiere bemoaned the atypical storyline, the music declared too dry, and the singing too sparse. The opera's failure to dazzle initial audiences is likely because it was originally written for television. Copland was commissioned to write this opera for television in 1952, but was rejected by NBC in 1953, with no official explanation given as to why. The New York City Opera premiere, therefore, was not an accurate representation of Aaron Copland's vision. The opera eventually did find receptive audiences, each success marked by a smaller, more intimate venue, not unlike the intimacy afforded on a sound stage. Perhaps most notable of these was the touring 1993 University of Minnesota production that performed in barns and farmhouses throughout the Midwest. Through this tour, the opera reached a rural community mirrored in the story, providing much more opportunity for the audience to connect to the characters. However, the question remains what caused NBC to initially reject the opera. This paper exposes the likely political obstacles that prevented Copland's opera from premiering in its intended medium, and the subsequent consequences of displacing *The Tender Land* from its television premiere.

KEYWORDS: Opera and Politics; McCarthyism; Aaron Copland; Red Scare; Music and Society; 20th Century Musicology

1. Introduction: What is *The Tender Land?*

Aaron Copland was already a successful and established master of American sound in 1952 when the League of Composers commissioned Copland's first and only full-length opera: *The Tender Land*. Copland was a natural fit. He had already cultivated a reputation as the premiere American composer of symphonic works. The opera was to be premiered as a television program on NBC, a station with a history of using its reach to elevate the aural environment of the common American. However, NBC rejected the premier in 1954, the year it was to be aired. Why the network rejected America's musical ambassador is officially unknown, however, there are historical events that point to a politically charged motive.

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It must be considered that the opera broke many genre conventions at the time. The smaller orchestra size coupled with a uniquely character driven libretto was certainly hard for critics to accept after the first performances of the opera, despite favorable feedback from audience members. However, this was when the version originally intended for television was premiered on a live stage. It must also be considered that Copland's political profile and that of his associates appeared dangerous to Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House of Un-American Activities Committee. The scrutiny of this Committee disrupted the lives of many actors, directors, screenwriters, and composers, Copland included. Copland was first commissioned to write *The Tender Land* in 1952 and meant to premiere it in 1954. In 1953, however, he was brought before Sen. McCarthy and asked about his ties to the Communist party. The following year, NBC rejected his opera, which was forced into the medium of live opera, for which it was not written. The evidence will show that NBC's 1954 rejection of *The Tender Land* was a result of his investigation in 1953.

2. Copland the Student, Copland the Master

In her *Musical Quarterly* article, Annegret Fauser postulates that "Copland's American identity...was constructed in dialogue with French culture and its understandings of American cultural practice".[1] Copland's American sound was a Parisian perception of the American sound. Prior to attending the American School at Fontainebleau, Copland studied with Rubin Goldmark in Manhattan for four years. While Copland was grateful for Goldmark's guidance of the fundamentals and expertise in traditional harmony, he recognized that his teacher could not guide his avant-garde tendencies.[2] Paris in the 1920s was the next logical step. During the roaring 20's, Paris was a hotbed of expatriate artistic activity: Joyce and Hemingway were just some among the many famous artists who

[1] Annegret Fauser, "Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, and the Making of an 'American' Composer", *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 89, No. 4 (Winter, 2006). pp. 524-554, http://0-www.jstor.org.opac.sfsu.edu/stable/25172851

[2] *Aaron Copland: A Self-Portrait*. Directed by Films Media Group. 1985. Infobase.com. *4:01-4:53.*

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flocked to Paris for its social laissez faire attitude and rich artistic history.[3]As soon as he arrived, Copland wasted no time getting to know the city's music. His first day in Paris, he attended *Le Maries de la Tour Eiffel*, an absurdist ballet written by "five of Les Six".[4] Under the tutelage of Nadia Boulanger, Copland could explore more modern techniques unfettered by convention. It was in Paris that Copland began a search for the American Sound. He noticed how unified French musicians were, and thought, why not in the United States?

The professional connections Copland made in Paris are exactly what brought him back to the United States. Through Boulanger, Copland was introduced to Serge Koussevitzky, who "proposed that Copland write a work for organ and orchestra"[5]. Koussevitzky helped Copland premiere *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* in 1923 in Boston, where Koussevitzky had taken over the Boston Symphony orchestra. This relationship would continue throughout Copland's career, including work on *The Tender Land* in the year following its premiere. *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* was a success, and Aaron Copland continued to his next project. The *Piano Variations*, published in 1930, were Copland's first attempt at capturing the American sound in Classical music. Like many European composers in the 1920s, he turned to Jazz for inspiration. While some critics were skeptical of the piece, the right people, experts in the field of classical music composition, recognized the young composer's ability and potential to develop further.[6]

During his time in Paris, Copland was also exposed to leftist politics. From shows such as *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny Singspiel* by Kurt Weill, Copland learned that a composer "could combine social critique with mass appeal". The group of theatre society with which he was associated, a New York group called "Group Theatre" was later confirmed to include a "Communist Cell". However, Copland's contributions seemed to be less about

[3] *A Self Portrait 5:10-5:20.*

[4] Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise.* (New York: Picador, 2007), 287.

[5]Ibid., 288.

[6] Ibid., 293.

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Communism and more about the music.[7] He would continue to financially contribute to various arts programs both in his native New York and abroad. It was 1932 when Copland's sense of purpose came to its fullest fruition yet, in the form of an invitation to compose and perform an original work in Mexico. Commissioned by the minister of public education, Copland's piece was meant to appeal to the masses. He found inspiration from the rural folk music in the area, and fused it with his urban background to create a synthesis of the old and new with *El Salon Mexico*. This piece would mark the first major work of Copland's to contribute to his massive popularity outside of the musical and artistic elite. *Billy the Kid,* a ballet about the notorious outlaw of the Old West, cemented Copland's style as reflecting "the open prairie". [8]

After the success of *El Salon Mexico* and *Billy the Kid*, Copland was approached by dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, for whom he wrote a ballet inspired by the Shaker pioneers. As with previous symphonic works, Copland found genuine folk tunes on which to base his music. The melodies were open though not sparse. As the folk tune's title, "simple gifts" implies, Copland and Graham created a folk-based ballet: music for the people as much as any of Copland's music that captured a piece of the American condition. While the folk music used was "Simple Gifts", Copland always used the working title "Ballet for Martha", which she eventually dubbed, *Appalachian Spring.* Dancer Pearl Lang loved dancing for Copland's music and thanked the composer "for the wide use of time...for the energy his music ignites in us, and for the limitless space that we hear in his sound. With Aaron's music, one leaps not across the stage, but across the land." This ballet that reflects the American landscape was widely well received by critics and even won a Pulitzer prize.[9] Once again, Copland was hailed as a purveyor of the American Sound.

[7] Ibid., 297.

[8] Ibid., 300

[9] Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, "Copland since 1943." St. Martin's Press. New York: 1989. 44-46

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During WWII, Copland was commissioned to write patriotic works by various committees and government agencies. This was due in large part to the New Deal, which funded agencies such as the Work Progress Administration and the Federal Music Project. In 1942 Copland was commissioned to write a piece to help the American people take courage as the nation entered WWII. *Lincoln Portrait* featured, in addition to folk-inspired music, quotes from President Lincoln to be spoken by a narrator. This piece, along with his ballets and symphonies was "enshrined...in Copland's gallery of 'hits'".[10]

Copland did briefly work in Hollywood during and shortly after WWII. He scored the quintessentially American stories of *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town.* However, it was *The North Star,* a film about Ukrainian villagers fighting against the Nazi forces, that had a hint of wartime propaganda: Germans are bad, allies are good. By 1943 when the film was released, the tide of the war was finally turned, and the Western governments were already looking toward the next big threat: Russia, and the territories it controlled. Copland composed, with lyrics and some tunes written by Ira Gershwin, original music with elements of traditional "Soviet material"[11] in the form of folksongs from both Ukraine where the films took place, and other parts of Russia. He was drawn to the script initially because he believed the story [did] "a magnificent job of humanizing the plain people of Russia".[12] Copland loved being on set and was impressed by the movie making process. After the film's release, Copland was disappointed that the songs were not being played on the radio, a sentiment that he shared with the lyricist Ira Gershwin. Ira perceptively responded, "It may be...that songs from *North Star* would be considered controversial by the advertising agencies, which, frequently control the policy of music on their programs". The music itself was not disliked, in fact, a *Variety* magazine review pointed out

[10] Ross, *The Rest is Noise,* 329.

[11] Perlis, Vivian "Since 1943" 16.

[12] Ibid., 8.

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that Copland's music was so "authentic as to be capable of deceiving even the experts into thinking them genuine".[13] Gershwin pointed out the reality that would later haunt Copland in a new way: music is at the mercy of those with purse-strings, so much so that even masterpieces will sometimes be silenced.

Despite minor disappointments in Hollywood, Copland established his distinctly American sound by adapting folk songs of the area he wished to reflect, and it earned him widespread popularity and prestige. *El Salon Mexico* and his other Americana pieces endeared him to the American public as *Piano Variations* endeared him to classical music's elite. Copland rarely refused a commission, which led him all over the world as a musical ambassador, representing the arts of the United States. In 1947, Copland toured South America while the chair of the U.S. group for Latin American music, a group whose goal it was to include South American composers in the general direction of 20th century music.[14] He would teach many of these South American musicians met on his travels, back in the United States. Copland's sense of the global musical community was a strength for classical music. However, this commendable behavior, and willingness to take on the role of ambassador, also contributed to his FBI file.

3. NBC: A Brief History of the Arts at the Network

NBC was first founded in 1926 by David Sarnoff. Sarnoff, since beginning his career in radio broadcast, felt that television could be used to elevate the culture of the public. Sarnoff made a point to feature classical music, going so far as to create the NBC symphony.[15] From its inception, NBC had been a champion of the classical arts. This carried over into television when NBC did. The American Ballet Theatre made its television debut in 1949 on the network, while Copland was touring the world as a lecturer, ambassador of both music and the United States government. In 1953, when Copland was under suspicion by HUAC, Sylvester Weaver ran NBC. However, this new management also

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] Ibid., 84.

[15] Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 288.

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considered himself a patron of the arts. He believed so deeply that broadcasting should educate as well as entertain, that he typically required NBC shows to include at least one sophisticated cultural reference or performance per installment.[16] However, the man who controlled what symphonic and operatic music was broadcast, was Peter Herman Adler. Like his boss, Adler was a great advocate of the arts. He was associated with Modern composers of the day, including Copland. What would cause such an opera-friendly network to reject an opera that combined the medium with the American people themselves? It was certainly not an abhorrence of the composer's previous work. It then must be explored whether NBC had another reason to distance itself from the country's premier musical ambassador.

4. Blacklisted: HUAC Appearance and Subsequent Fallout

On May 26, 1953 Aaron Copland, accompanied by his council, Charles Glover, appeared in front of the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to be questioned about his possible affiliations with the Communist party. Copland appeared to comply with the Committee's questions, however, he was very careful with his answers. When asked if he'd ever been to a Communist meeting he did not give a definitive yes or no, but declared that he had not "to [his] knowledge" Similarly, when he was asked about attending meetings with known Communists, again Copland answered "not to my knowledge". Many of Copland's answers were definite "no's" however, certain questions, such as "Did anyone ever discuss with you the possibility of your joining the Communist party? Mr. COPLAND. Not that I recall".[17] In this reply, Copland absolved himself of Communist activity, accidental involvement included, without any lies. Senator McCarthy, seemed to pick up on the tactic. McCarthy followed this

[16] Vance Kepley Jr. "Weaver, Sylvester (Pat)". Museum of Broadcast Communications. 1994 http://www.museum.tv/eotv/weaversylve.htm

[17] Executive Sessions of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations vol. 2. Pg. 1267-1270 Senate.gov 2003 http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Volume2.pdf .

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with a thinly veiled threat, in which he advised Copland to take advantage of the Fifth Amendment, or to remain silent; to which Copland politely, but firmly defended himself:

> "Senator McCarthy, I would like to say now, I received a telegram to be here Friday. The telegram gave me no hint as to why I was coming. If I am to be questioned on affiliations over a period of many years it is practically impossible without some kind of preparation to be able to answer definitely one way or another when I was and what I was connected with. This comes as a complete surprise.[18]

Copland was consistent in his answers. He insisted upon being a composer who was not a political thinker, but a purely musical one. McCarthy went so far as to question Copland's qualifications to work for the government. Copland was examined for professorships and lecture positions taken in other countries. No longer a musical ambassador for the country, but an enthusiastic participant in what McCarthy's committee called "Communist Fronts". The very connections that earned Copland his reputation as the United States musical representative were now being flashed before him as evidence of disloyalty. Furthermore, as with many of the other HUAC interviews, Copland's interrogation was full of interruptions, and presumptions that political agenda dictated Copland's collaborative choices. McCarthy enlisted the help of the CIA to track Copland's movements for years after this initial hearing. In fact, the FBI investigation was not fully closed until 1975,[19] meaning, when NBC declined to premiere *The Tender Land*, the federal investigation was ongoing and far from closed.

While it is now considered common knowledge that these trials were a sham and witch-hunt, Copland's career was undoubtedly damaged by Senator McCarthy's paranoia. *Lincoln Portrait,* arguably the most patriotic of his Americana pantheon, was originally on the program for President Dwight Eisenhower's inauguration. However, it was

[18] Executive Sessions, 1268.

[19] Darlene Superville. "Noted Composer's FBI file is both sharp, flat". *LA Times.* 11 May 2003. LATimes.com. Accessed 20 Sept. 2016, par 12.

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pulled from the program due to the suspicions surrounding him even before the trial, which would occur months later. Prior to this in 1949, Copland produced his Third Symphony. Despite the audience's obvious approval of the piece, critics called Copland's style "New Deal-ish" which could be a reference to a quotation in the fourth movement of his own *Fanfare for the Common Man*. This was also the year in which Copland attended a Conference for World Peace, where he met with Russian composer Shostakovich.[20] The association with this Russian composer as well as Russian born Koussevitzky contributed further to the gossip surrounding Copland. In August of 1953, Copland was meant to return to Mexico to help direct a concert series; the Passport Office gave him grief for weeks, demanding letters, and proof of affiliation with "anti-Communist organizations".[21] The University of Alabama withdrew an invitation to speak at a Music Forum, citing the accusations in its rejection letter. The Hollywood Bowl committee cancelled a March 1953 concert and provided no explanation at all. When Peter Herman Adler rejected *The Tender Land* a year later, he too declined to state an official reason.

5. The Making of *The Tender Land*

Heavy with the loss of work associated with, in his own words "the McCarthy business", Copland retreated to Tanglewood to complete work on his opera. Copland wrote *The Tender Land* in tandem with Horace Everett, a pseudonym for Erik Johns. For the purposes of this paper, he will be called by his pen-name. Librettist Horace Everett narrowed Agee and Evan's anthropological study, *Now Let Us Praise Famous Men*, to focus on one fictional, composite family: The Moss family. Everett admits in the notes before the libretto that he did not read Agee's prose but studied Evan's photographs in detail. It was in a photograph of a mother and daughter that inspired the Moss family. Everett

[20] Ross, Alex "The Rest is Noise" 404.

[21] Perlis, Vivian "Since 1943" 198.

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claimed it was the contrast of the two people, the daughter's face, "not yet hardened by the grim life, the other passive, stoney, yet very much a mother, despite her private bitterness".[22]

The bitterness to which Everett refers is evident in Agee's description of the first tenant family with whom he and Evans stayed. Upon arriving at the house, the men realize they've stumbled into a Sunday visit from extended family, and they appear to not appreciate the interruption, especially by strangers. While the men are courteous enough, the women's eyes are "quietly and openly hostile".[23] The fierce and bitter women are blended into one character in the opera: Ma Moss, who is quick to gossip and accuse outsiders in the name of protecting her children. Everett's synopsis of the opera is brief, but so much is revealed in this simple story.

The stage opens on the Moss family house, "everything is in need of repair".[24] Already, it is established that this life is a hard one. This opera would not have the flashy spectacle found in Bel Canto or Verismo Italian opera. The postman arrives to warn Ma Moss of two strangers who have "frightened" one of the girls on a neighboring farm. Here Everett plants the seed that will bloom into the central conflict of the story. Two young men, Top and Martin, arrive on the farm, looking for work. This was common in the 1930s. So many people were out of work that drifting strangers would often beg for a place to sleep and a meal in exchange for a day's work. Reluctantly, the grandfather of the family concedes to this bargain. Friendly Laurie goes so far as to invite them to her graduation celebration to take place later

[22] Horace Everett, and Aaron Copland "The Tender Land: An opera in 2 Acts: Synopsis" *Tempo No. 31 (Spring 1954)* Cambridge University Press. 13

[23] Agee, "Let us Now Praise Famous Men" 32.

[24] Everett, "Synopsis". 10.

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that night. Agee and Walker themselves appear to serve as inspiration for the two drifters, the outsiders of the story. They were in their mid-twenties when they gathered all their data.

Act II takes place at Laurie's party. While Martin gets patriarch Grandpa Moss drunk, to clear Top's path to a dalliance with Laurie, Ma Moss is on a mission of her own. Ma is convinced that the two young men her father-in-law hired for the day are in fact the two fugitives mentioned in Act I. She has no evidence but the feeling in her gut, yet her concerns voiced to Mr. Splinters, the local postman, quickly spread around the community as Mr. Splinters goes to fetch the sheriff.

Naturally, Laurie and Martin have fallen in love. Their first kiss is interrupted by a drunk grandpa, confirming Ma's suspicions and ruining Laurie's party in one fell, stumbling swoop. The sheriff's arrival confirms Top and Martin's innocence. Nonetheless, they are told they must leave in the morning. Martin convinces Laurie to leave with them, but Top, who Everett describes as "severely practical" insists that Martin and Top leave right away without her to avoid any further altercations. After the loss of her first love, Laurie realizes she wants to go out into the world beyond her hometown, regardless of whether she has a man or not. She leaves with Ma's tearful blessing.

On its surface, the story appears plain. There is little time spent with the characters and the story is contained to two locations in a small town. It is with Copland's music that Everett's open story is filled in. As in his other pieces depicting the American landscape, Copland's melodies are simple, and his intervals wide. Dissonance is used sparingly, but to great effect. *The Tender Land*'s score evokes the sense of "limitless space" felt by the original dancers of *Appalachian Spring*. In the opening of the opera, the first to sing is Ma Moss, as she describes her day to day duties, concluding each time that "a woman has to" take care of her family be it sewing clothes or feed them with her kitchen utensils. Ma's simple vocal line begins on the E-flat major tonic and ascends the major scale to the dominant, gently returning to the tonic again. However, that E-flat is only touched on, while the second scale degree contains the final syllable of the

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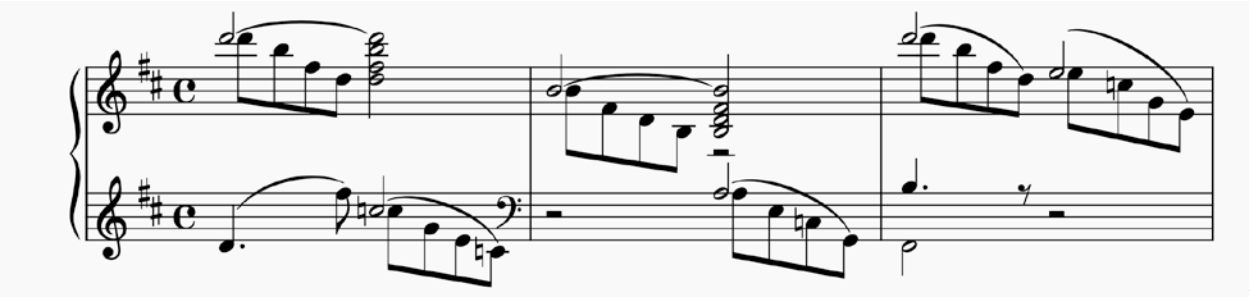
phrase, and the longest value of the measure, implying that the song will continue.[25] Ma's lines are folkish and simple, but Copland finds subtle ways to sustain the phrase, to hold the attention of the audience. The aria simply titled "Laurie's Song" is one of the more frequently extracted pieces of the opera. The opening passage is a descending, gentle arpeggio of a D-Major seventh chord, leaving out the fifth. Had this chord been stacked, it would have had a very different effect.



[26]

Figure 2. The opening measures of "Laurie's Song".

The vocal line is likewise simple, a relaxed line of mostly eighth notes, underscored with an orchestra suspended on whole notes, with vague echoes of the vocal phrases dotted throughout. As Laurie changes her thoughts from reflection and nostalgia to her impending graduation, the music's tempo picks up, and the orchestra becomes more dissonant, culminating in a chromatically charged inverted ninth chord, a stark contrast to the otherwise folkish tune. However, as soon as Laurie finishes asking, "What makes me think I'd like to try to go down all those roads beyond that line above the earth and 'neath the sky?"[27] the opening passage is recalled, and the consonance is brought back.[28] Copland toys with modern techniques but always brings the piece back to familiar diatonic territory. The music

[25] Aaron Copland and Horace Everett *The Tender Land: An Opera in Two Acts"* Boosey & Hawkes. New York: 1998. 2-3.

[26] Ibid., 26.

[27] Ibid., 28.

[28] Ibid., 26-30.

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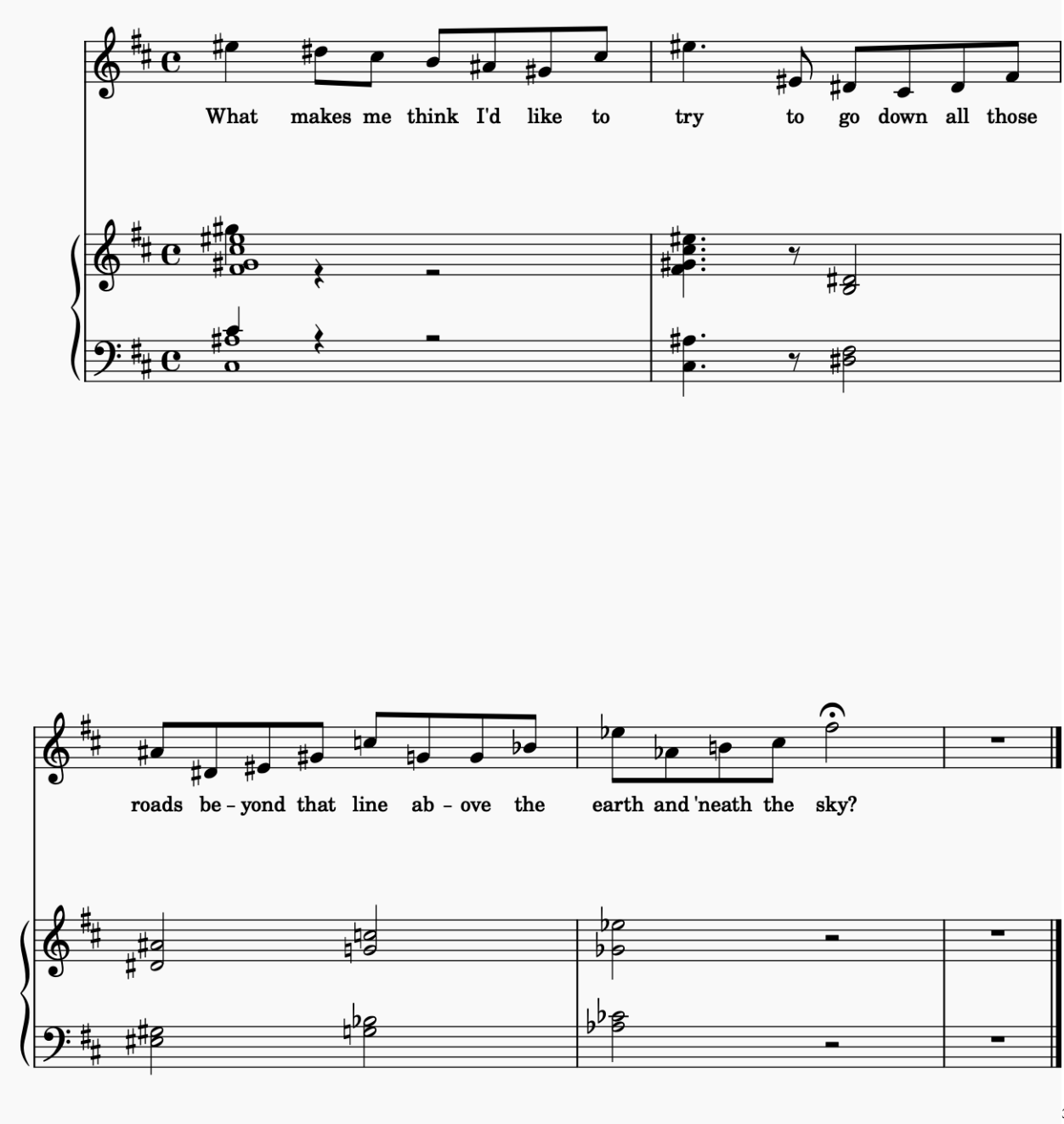
serves the text, but also expands the text into the landscape and characters. These melodies are simple to serve their intended performers. Copland himself said that "my opera...was for young people to perform, and for that reason it is rather simple in musical style and story line"[29]



[30]

Figure 3. The aria's most dissonant moment is also Laurie's moment of most uncertainty.

[29] Perlis, Vivian, "Since 1943". 211.

[30] Copland, *The Tender Land* 28.

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Though the opera is a unique piece for the genre, the orchestral techniques and vocal lines are quite typical when compared to Copland's other works, especially those featuring that open prairie sound still associated with Copland today. If the music is not what caused the opera's rejection from its intended premiere, the fault must lie with the story, or outside the opera entirely. While Laurie's development and coming of age story is central to the opera's plot, Top and Martin as victims highlight an important theme: gossip can quickly snowball out of control and ruin the lives of the innocent, a message that was sadly unheard, or perhaps heard too clearly, by NBC.

Despite its initial rejection, on April 1, 1954, *The Tender Land* made its debut on stage with the New York City Opera. The reviews that followed discouraged Copland entirely, and he only continued to work on the piece at the insistence of Horace Everett. Everett understood the work they made to be innovative, and certainly a departure from the normal spectacle ridden operas being performed at the time: in short, *The Tender Land* was something new[31]. So new in fact, that the pair would have to clarify it as such to a public unprepared for such a departure from opera as they knew it. The premiere had many obstacles before a note was played. Due to its short length, it was paired with Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors,* an inappropriate pairing. Menotti's Christmas story was composed in the same vein as mainstream Italian opera at the time, both in the spectacle and the predictably happy ending of the story, as well as the dramatic bel-canto melodies. The staging for *The Tender Land* had to be changed late in the rehearsal process. When first rehearsing the climactic "The Promise of Living", the singers were originally seated in the frame of a barn, creating an aesthetic vision to accompany the music. However, the orchestra drowned out the singers, and they were

[31] Christopher W. Patton. "Discovering 'The Tender Land' A New Look at Aaron Copland's Opera." American Music 20, no. 3 (2002):318.

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forced to simply 'park and bark', or stand downstage and sing facing the audience.[32] In his dissertation in which he reexamines the opera's live stage life, Christopher Patton perceptively notes that Copland and Horace "[replaced] a 'conflict/ resolution' type of storytelling with something far more daring: an attempt to capture a fleeting moment in the cycles of our lives".[33] The audience during this performance, similarly to that of the Third Symphony, was moved, particularly composer Louise Talma, who wept during the performance because she felt Laurie's story "mirrored her own".[34] Some of the criticism of the show was that Laurie did not end up with Martin, but struck out on her own. Female independence was rarely depicted in the arts, both operatic and otherwise. Critics from the New York Times, Tribune, and Post all believed the music was too "dry", and the staging too sparse: in other words, the opera did not depend on spectacle as much as a typical European opera. Patton argues that on television, many of these problems would have been solved. In television, "you could achieve an intimacy with the character's psychology that you could not in live opera".[35]

After some edits were made, the opera was performed that summer at Tanglewood in rural Massachusetts. However, it was that Autumn in Oberlin, Ohio, where a change in critical response was notable. One reviewer noticed that the opera was something new. While the open chords, character driven plot, and subdued set were noted, the performance was "charming" overall.[36] Despite this, the bad reputation was out, and revivals of *The Tender Land* were hard to find. It would not be until 1987 that the opera would find its audience. Arvin Brown and Murry Sidlin collaborated on a breakthrough production at the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven, Connecticut. The production ran for more than sixty performances. The show was popular with Universities, such as the University of Minnesota's

[32] Ibid., 321.

[33] Ibid., 328.

[34] Ibid., 319.

[35] Ibid., 321.

[36] Ibid., 320.

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touring performance that performed for Midwestern farmers: people who lived the story that they saw on stage. In these performances, barns were sung in instead of opera houses, and instead of set, the real horizon became Laurie's "place between the earth and sky". Houses were routinely packed for these productions, sometimes greater than the town's population.[37] One performer of this touring production stated "you can really count on the audience's imagination to be there, too, because really it's their own reality"[38] *The Tender Land* resonated with middle America, those who Copland was trying to reach in the first place.

6. Conclusion: Art Displaced

The performance history of *The Tender Land* is full of obstacles as a direct result of being premiered on stage when it was written for television. The desired staging could not be accomplished due to the volume of the orchestra. On television, the orchestra could be recorded separately, or even if played live with the performers, microphone levels could vary. Cameras could also capture human emotion with more subtlety than on a live stage, in an era before opera houses displayed digital screens for the cheap seats in the back. Copland's first audience would have been those Midwestern farmers, had the opera premiered on television. *The Tender Land* achieves exactly what NBC wished to with their classical music outreach, and yet, something kept the network from seeing or hearing the potential of this opera.

The Tender Land was a piece between genres. It was not quite opera, not quite musical theater, but not ballet. Everett described the piece as a "tone-poem"[39] However, Copland never wrote typical music. From *Piano Variations* to *Fanfare for the Common Man*, Copland wrote with a strange juxtaposition of simplicity and complexity that resonated with audiences, often before it resonated with critics. His ballets and symphonic works feature the same "Copland

[37] Ibid., 322-334.

[38] Charles Kuralt and Eugenia Zuckerman. "Opera on the Farm" CBS. 18 June 1993. Accessed Oct 3 2016. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/opera-on-the-farm/.

[39] Ibid., 337.

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sound" heard in his one full-length opera. Based on the evidence of Copland's popularity among other musicians and the government prior to the McCarthy trial, the late-rejection of his arguably most patriotic piece from a presidential inauguration, and NBC's own relationship with composers of Western Art music, it is evident that Copland's interrogation contributed greatly if not wholly to NBC's rejection of *The Tender Land.* It is true that the opera itself was ahead of its time. The storyline was uncommon and morally ambiguous. Laurie shaking off the loss of her first love and striking out on her own alienated critics and certainly could have done the same for Mr. Adler. However, the opera speaks for itself. The composer's place in music history during his own lifetime speaks for itself. To deny HUAC's role in the rejection of *The Tender Land* by NBC would be to deny the committee's role in creating the very paranoid atmosphere perpetuated by that committee.

From the desired staging, to allow the audience to view performers up close, *The Tender Land* was put at a great disadvantage, yet "It has proven relevant to young women struggling in a male-dominated society, homosexuals coping with the strictures of a straight culture, rural people facing the collapse of the family farm, and parents of all backgrounds whose children turn their backs on home to seek their own way in the world".[40] Copland's music resonated with those he represented: those living outside of the accepted norm in society. Copland recognized the power music had to represent the marginalized and to make social commentary on the human condition. This is evident in *The Tender Land.* Though it is what got him into so much trouble, Copland's musical activism is what made his music so important, and why it continues to resonate with us today.

[40] Ibid., 337.

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