

Making an American Dance:

Billy the Kid, Rodeo, and Appalachian Spring

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Few American composers had a longer or more intimate association with dance than Aaron Copland. He discovered it as an exciting form of theater art in Paris during his student years, which coincided with the heyday of Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois. In the Paris of the early 1920s new music and ballet were synonymous. Stravinsky, Prokofiev, and Falla were stars of the "Russian" troupe; Satie, Milhaud, and Honegger of the "Swedish" one. In 1923, like so many other young composers, Copland attended the revival of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and the first performance of his *Les Noces*, as well as the premiere of Milhaud's *La Création du Monde*. Copland's first orchestral score, which he began in Paris, was a ballet. Although it was never produced, he recycled parts of it in his 1929 *Dance Symphony*, an independent orchestral work, and his 1934 ballet for Ruth Page, *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!*. "Ballet was the big thing in Paris during the 1920s," he told Phillip Ramey in 1980. "One of the first things I did upon arriving in Paris in 1921 was to go to the Ballets Suédois, where I saw Milhaud's *L'Homme et son Désir*."¹

Copland discovered ballet in the aftermath of Diaghilev's modernist revolution. Through his successive choreographers—Michel Fokine and Vaslav Nijinsky before World War I, Léonide Massine, Bronislava Nijinska, and George Balanchine during and after the war—Diaghilev transformed not only what ballet looked like but also how it sounded. With his impetus the one-act ballet became the modernist standard. He jettisoned the choreographic formulas identified with Marius Petipa and late-nineteenth-century Russian tradition—the pas de deux and variation, the divertissement, the *grand pas* that presented the dancers by rank climaxing in the appearance of the ballerina and her partner, the division of dances into "numbers," and the mime scenes that "explained" the dramatic action. These conventions shaped

ballet music as well as choreography; they determined the structure of the score, the sequence of the dances, the duration of individual numbers, the time signature, and the expressive quality. Even in *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), a turning point in the development of music for the ballet, Tchaikovsky only partly transcended the conventions that tied his work to Petipa's.

As Diaghilev and his choreographers abandoned the old formulas, they looked for new music. Fokine, following the lead of Isadora Duncan, pieced together *Chopiniana* (1908) (renamed *Les Sylphides* by Diaghilev in 1909) from the waltzes and mazurkas of Chopin: music with a dance rhythm even if it was composed for the concert hall. Diaghilev himself adopted this strategy, as Balanchine did later, assembling scores from preexisting music, with varying degrees of editorial intervention. At the same time, Diaghilev began to commission new works, creating a body of twentieth-century music for the ballet stage that has yet to be surpassed. His great discovery was Stravinsky, his "first son," as he called him, but he also commissioned scores from Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev, Falla, Satie, Poulenc, and many others.² Although these scores had a libretto, they were independent of the dance structure and step text. Music had become the "floor" of a ballet, the base on which to build the dance. In divorcing the ballet score from the choreographic text, Diaghilev made ballet music something "real" composers wrote, with a life beyond the stage. Numerous works of the twentieth-century concert hall began life as ballets.

Although this new music flourished above all in Europe, echoes could be heard in the United States. John Alden Carpenter teamed up with Diaghilev alumnus Adolph Bolm for several productions, beginning with *The Birthday of the Infanta*, a "ballet-pantomime" produced in 1919 by the Chicago Grand Opera Company. This was followed in 1922 at New York's Town Hall by *Krazy Kat*, a "jazz pantomime" inspired by George Herriman's popular comic strip.³ Carpenter's *Skyscrapers*, choreographed by Sammy Lee (following the action laid out by the composer and scene designer, Robert Edmond Jones) and produced in 1926 by the Metropolitan Opera, was actually commissioned three years earlier by Diaghilev.⁴ Interesting as these ballets may have been, none survived as stage works, although *Skyscrapers* remains alive as a concert work.⁵

Although dance flourished on the American commercial stage, it had yet to gain recognition as a concert form. Many "art" dancers went to Paris; those who stayed home pursued concert work between jobs in vaudeville. Moreover, prior to the mid-1920s, concert dance adhered to the prewar "Greek" and "exotic" styles popularized by Duncan, Denishawn, and their imitators. American concert dance was thus far from "modern," as this term was understood in the postwar years.

The appearance of a new generation of concert dancers in the late 1920s transformed the American dance world. Breaking with their predecessors, dancer-choreographers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey began to create works that acknowledged the modernist revolution in music, the visual arts, and choreography. The first of these emerging modern dancers to use Copland's music was Helen Tamiris in *Lull* (1929), *Sentimental Dance* (1930), and *Olympus Americanus* (1931). Martha Graham followed with *Dithyrambic* (1931), a solo choreographed to Copland's Piano Variations, which premiered during a season that also included pieces by Schoenberg and Villa-Lobos.⁶ "Surely only an artist with an understanding of my work," Copland later wrote, "could have visualized dance material in so rhythmically and complex and thematically abstruse a composition."⁷ The "modern dance," as people were beginning to call the new form, was linked from the start to modern music.

Another early dancer to use Copland's music was Ruth Page. Ballet-trained and Chicago-based, a veteran of the Anna Pavlova company, and a protégée of Adolph Bolm, Page was remarkably open to modern work. As ballet director of the Chicago Grand Opera Company, she often commissioned music by contemporary composers, and she worked closely with Nicolas Remisoff, the Russian modern designer who had collaborated with Bolm throughout the 1920s. Her technical approach was similarly broad-minded. Sometimes she donned the tutu and pointe shoes of a ballerina. Just as often she took them off and danced like a modern.⁸ She couldn't have done this in New York, where ballet and modern dance belonged to warring camps. Perhaps it was because the stakes were higher in Gotham, the epicenter of the new modern dance but also the country's ballet capital, with a strong—and growing—Russian presence. And she had few scruples about borrowing from the popular stage.

By 1934, when Page commissioned *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* from Copland, national identity had become a pressing issue for citizens throughout American society. Dancers were also part of this conversation, and in their case the issue took the form of a question: What was American dance? For the moderns, the answer was self-evident. It was what they did (and what they sometimes called "the American dance"). It was definitely not ballet, born in Renaissance courts and financed by absolute monarchs and czars, a form scripted in hierarchy and disciplined through technique—an inheritance alien to the free, American, democratic body. "All the dogma of the ballet was either rejected out of hand or transformed or adjusted to new urgencies and concepts," recalled José Limón, a dancer-choreographer who began to study at the Humphrey-Weidman studio in 1929:

The all-important barre was done away with, much as Protestant reformers did away with altars, statues, and crucifixes. The basic barre exercises were performed in the middle of the studio. Stretches were done standing or sitting on the floor. Nobody pointed his toes. The movements of the torso took on a new and crucial importance. . . . Movement was no longer decorative but functional. . . . It had to dig beneath the surface to find beauty, even if this meant it had to be "ugly." The elegant contours of ballet were twisted and distorted. . . . Away with the debris of a decadent past: an austere, even stark, simplicity was in order.⁹

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! (1934) was set in a courtroom, with three different witnesses giving strikingly different accounts of the murder of a cabaret dancer. There was a big cast, including a "suggestively attired and writhing bevy of chorus girls" (in the words of one New York critic), lawyers, jurymen, a Mae West-type nightclub hostess, a maniac, and Page as the murder victim. Jazz permeated the score. Distorted segments of "The Star Spangled Banner" highlighted the theme of legal corruption and a parody of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" the cynicism of the newlyweds.¹⁰ Lurid headlines—"MURDER!" "GUILTY!" "RED-HOT JAZZ!"—flashed on an overhead screen.¹¹ Like many left-wing dances of the early 1930s, *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* had a contemporary urban setting and a critical edge. To be sure, Page's cabaret dancer had little to do with the homeless shop girls and striking miners of Workers' Dance League concerts.¹² But the ballet took place in a city; it was filled with the characters and sounds of urban life, as well as its violence.

Not everyone equated modern dance with American dance. Among the dissenters was Lincoln Kirstein, the patron extraordinaire who invited Balanchine, a Russian émigré choreographer, to the United States in 1933 and stood by him until his death fifty years later. Along the way they founded the School of American Ballet (1934) and the New York City Ballet (1948). Like so many artists and intellectuals, Kirstein fell in love with ballet because of the Ballets Russes. Kirstein was rich and immensely cultured, a writer and collector of contemporary art, a Harvard man, a man who today would be called queer, a member of the junior committee of the Museum of Modern Art, and a leftist. He went everywhere, saw everything, heard everything. Strongly opinionated, he treated modern dance like a *bête noire*; he hated its cult of personality, rejection of tradition, and individualized "systems" of movement.¹³ At the same time, he was dismayed by the resurgence of the so-called international or post-Diaghilev Ballet Russe companies whose wildly successful whistle-stop tours of the

United States in the 1930s under Sol Hurok's management trumpeted the idea that ballet was "Russian."

It was in this climate that Kirstein made his debut as an impresario. In 1935 the American Ballet, his first company with Balanchine, opened in New York. The reviews were tepid. John Martin, the powerful dance critic of the *New York Times* who supported the idea of an indigenous ballet troupe, threw down the gauntlet. Why import Balanchine, a Russian who had spent most of the previous decade in France, to develop an American company? "The problem resolves itself into one fundamental decision," Martin wrote. "Is the organization to attempt the fulfilment of its original policy of developing an American ballet, or is it to follow the direction of its present season and go on being merely 'Les Ballets Americains'?"¹⁴

Kirstein raged, but the following year he launched a small touring ensemble called Ballet Caravan. Everything about the Caravan was American: the personnel—meaning the dancers, designers, composers, and choreographers—and the subject matter, conveyed in titles like *Pocahontas*, *Yankee Clipper*, and *Tom*, a ballet based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that Kirstein tried for years to produce. Just as Diaghilev had yoked the idea of Russianness to modernism—a strategy adapted by the movement known as British ballet, as well as by companies such as Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois and Antonia Mercé's Les Ballets Espagnols—so Kirstein sought to do this with American material. In his case the subject matter drew on a national folklore redefined by the Left during the era of the Popular Front; in 1936 "Communism Is Americanism of the 20th Century" became the party's election slogan.¹⁵ Although his later autobiographical writings ignore politics, Kirstein was a committed leftist in the 1930s. He wrote for publications such as *The Nation*, *New Theatre*, and *TAC Magazine*, with close ties to the Communist-oriented Left.¹⁶ He joined the League of American Writers, was active in the John Reed Club, organizations later identified as Communist fronts, and was later "named" by friendly witnesses testifying in hearings before the Dies and other committees investigating "un-American" activities.¹⁷ The protagonists of his ballets—cowboys, sailors, a gas pump attendant—belonged to the new breed of American working-class heroes popularized in proletarian dramas like *Stevedore*.

"When Lincoln Kirstein, director of the Ballet Caravan, asks you to write a ballet for him it is a foregone conclusion that you are going to tackle an American subject," Copland wrote in an essay about the genesis of *Billy the Kid*, which seems to have been used for publicity purposes.¹⁸ For years Kirstein had been dreaming up ideas for ballets, including a

“mass of suggestions” from popular and literary sources, few of which were stage-worthy.¹⁹ Once the Caravan was launched, he was fired with energy, signing up collaborators, tutoring the untried choreographers, and managing the company of fifteen dancers, which—in a burst of leftist fervor—he tried to run as a collective. (It didn’t work. The dancers wanted more structure.)²⁰ After two seasons, the summer touring company became a year-round ensemble, with Kirstein even making plans to present chamber operas. Among the titles bandied about were Henry Brant’s and Cecil Helmy’s *Miss O’Grady* and Copland’s *The Second Hurricane*.²¹

It is unclear when Kirstein became interested in William Bonney, the desperado known as Billy the Kid, “who went west with his mother, killed twenty-one men . . . before he had lived twenty-one years, and was shot by his best friend, turned sheriff.”²² He later told dance historian Nancy Reynolds that Martha Graham’s *American Document*, which premiered in 1938, a little more than two months before *Billy*, had influenced the creation of the ballet.²³ Certainly, *Document* was a work he admired. In a review published in *The Nation* he called it the “most important extended dance creation by a living American,” no small praise, given his general disdain for modern dance.²⁴ It is mentioned in Graham’s letters to him, sometimes in conjunction with Kirstein’s *Memorial Day*, another project from 1937–38 that failed to materialize.²⁵ Subtitled “Dances for Democracy in Crisis,” *Memorial Day* was a drama for dancers, epic in scale, about the conflict that had torn apart an earlier America, the Civil War. Like *Document*, the detailed scenario for *Memorial Day* incorporated a number of historical texts—speeches by Abraham Lincoln (Second Inaugural Address) and Henry David Thoreau (“Plea for Capt. John Brown”); a letter by Walt Whitman to a bereaved mother; prayers, poems, testaments, and reports about slavery and the Civil War—the “crisis” referred to in the subtitle. The costume sketches, included with the scenario, were by Jared French, who designed *Billy the Kid*. According to the title page, Copland was to write the music, and Lew Christensen, Erick Hawkins, and Eugene Loring—all Ballet Caravan members at the time—were to share the choreography. *Memorial Day* thus anticipated the team responsible for *Billy*—Loring, French, and Copland. At the same time, *Memorial Day* reveals to what extent Kirstein’s vision of American history was politically engaged, emphasizing collective action rather than the heroics of individuality.

By 1937, Kirstein announced in *Blast at Ballet*, his impassioned defense of American ballet, Copland was on board for *Billy*. “Now we are working on Aaron Copland’s *Billy the Kid*, Elliot Carter Jr.’s *Pocahontas*, and a contemporary treatment of the Minotaur legend, more modern Nazi than ancient Greek, with music by Charles Naginski, who sometime after

starting our ballet, won the Prix de Rome.”²⁶ But it wasn’t until the following year that Copland found time to write the music. By then he had seen French’s costume designs and discussed the action with the choreographer.²⁷ Kirstein, ever one for sharing sources, “slipped” Copland books of cowboy tunes. While in London for the International Society for Contemporary Music festival, Copland received the scenario and “Notes on Billy the Kid’s Character” that Loring, doubtless with assistance from Kirstein, had compiled. Then, in Paris, in a studio on rue de Rennes, he sat down to compose.²⁸ The ballet premiered the following October.

Billy opens and closes with a horizontal trek across the stage, a march in silhouette of pioneers, invoking the millions who went west in the aftermath of the Civil War. The idea for this processional, Kirstein told Vivian Perlis, came from Graham, and is almost certainly the link with *American Document*, which also began and ended with “a parade of participants, using gestures borrowed from minstrel strut and cake-walk.”²⁹ “Loring starts his ballet,” Kirstein wrote in an advance piece in *The Dance Observer*, “not with Billy, but rather with the empty prairie, set with the bare silhouette of cactus columns. To a swelling march, the people who came across our plains move across our stage.”³⁰ The scenes that follow are terse, rapid, and cinematic. Billy appears, a child clinging to his mother’s skirts as she moves among the pioneer women, dance hall girls, cowhands, and Mexicans of a frontier town. His mother is slain, the accidental victim of a brawl; he plunges a knife into her murderer, avenging her, and a killer is born. In the episodes that follow he kills again and again. His victim is always the same, a character called Alias, who is sometimes a cowhand, a land agent, a sheriff, or Indian guide. The program note describes him as “the symbol of those men whom Billy shot with never one second of guilt, remorse or fright,” but Loring later said he was the “evil” in Billy’s nature—“what he tries to annihilate [but] cannot.”³¹ The tale moves toward its inevitable climax. Billy is captured, goes to jail, escapes, makes love to a sweetheart on the edge of the desert, and is shot. The Mexican women grieve, but in a reprise of the opening, the pioneers trek on. Billy is no more than a minor episode in the march of history.

In the 1970s, in an oral history for the New York Public Library, Loring described his collaboration with Copland. First, he (Loring) did the research. Then he made a simple dramatic outline. Next he wrote out all the incidents with timings. This was then given to Copland, who used the material to draft what he called “musical ideas.” When the two met again, they discussed “what music . . . should be used where.” Occasionally they differed. “I was rather astounded when the march was in 3/4,” Loring recalled, “and I questioned that because I had an idea that a march

should be in 6/8 or 4/4. . . . He reminded me that 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' is in 3." Sometimes practical considerations dictated where an idea would be used. Loring would say, "I like this idea for this event." Copland would say, "But you want . . . three minutes. . . . And this . . . idea will not develop for three minutes." Once the order was established, Copland began to compose. Later, as the ballet neared completion, Copland made short cuts and small additions to accommodate the choreography. "It was a marvelously compatible collaboration," Loring remembered with pleasure.³²

Many of the cowboy tunes that Kirstein had given Copland ended up in the music. "Old Granddad," "Git Along Little Dogies," "The Old Chisholm Trail," "Old Paint," "Oh Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," and others gave a distinctly American texture to the ballet. They were in the "very fabric of the score," as Chicago dance critic Ann Barzel wrote after the premiere, affecting and easy to hear, a form of plain speech rendered magical by the artist.³³ Similar textures were also woven into the choreography. Like Copland, Loring did his homework. His Mexican girls dance a *jarabe*; the revelers after Billy's arrest a Texas two-step. Work gestures abound in the opening march, and when Billy plays cards with his pal Garrett, one can almost see the cards slapping a rude table. The cowboys ride their horses with the raised knee of a child's gallop—a gesture both familiar and emblematic. And there is a casualness and loose-jointed ease in the dancing that seems very American.

In later years, Loring claimed that *Billy* "owed as much to modern dance as to ballet."³⁴ Like modern work of the 1930s, much of the movement is weighted rather than light, angular as opposed to rounded, and full of percussive punch. Feet can be flexed or pointed, and the dancers often work in parallel rather than in turnout. Whole families of ballet steps have disappeared, as well as pointe shoes (with one exception) and ballet arms. And only in Billy's duet with his sweetheart, the sole lyrical interlude, do we encounter the expansiveness and flow of a classical adagio, with its idealizing lexicon of lifts and pointe work. Elsewhere, when formal ballet steps are used—as in the triple pirouette—double tour phrase performed by Billy before he kills—they serve a gestural function, revealing something about his character. For Loring, ballet movement can tell only the fragments of a story or a very traditional one.

Except for some silent footage shot in 1939 in Chicago, little survives of the original production of *Billy*.³⁵ The ballet that exists today in repertory and in recordings stems from the version revived—and revised—by Loring for Ballet Theatre in 1940.³⁶ The original Billy had sixteen dancers. When Kirstein sold the production and the performance rights to Ballet Theatre, Loring more than doubled the size of the cast to thirty-five. He

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EUGENE LORING as *Billy the Kid*.

(George Platt Lynes)

Eugene Loring as Billy the Kid on the cover of the October 1938 issue of *Dance Observer*. Founded by Louis Horst, Martha Graham's music director and composer of several of her early works, *Dance Observer* covered—and championed—modern dance. Private collection.

beefed up the number of good guys. The bigger cast, he said, "made the marches at the beginning and at the end much more spectacular."³⁷ However, it also detracted from the exemplary character of the story, which the sparseness had underlined. Now, instead of six Dance Hall Girls, Mexicans, and Ranchers' Wives, there were three dance hall girls alone, real people rather than a collection of frontier types.

The original choreography was highly stylized. As John Martin commented in his Sunday column after the New York premiere, Loring's "medium is essentially a heightening and an abstraction of acting, . . . a kind of pantomime that has been rhythmically abstracted from natural gesture with great beauty and ingenuity."³⁸ One sees this clearly in footage from the original production. When Loring as Billy performs the riding gesture, he repeats it and phrases it, as if to say, "So what? Take that! And that!" In the dance that follows the battle, the revelers stomp and turn mechanically; their bodies are rigid, their faces blank, and they hold their arms to the side like marionettes. The grace notes of conventional expressiveness—linking steps, *épaulement*, turnout, soft wrists and elbows—are absent. Here, and elsewhere, Loring transforms the characters into American primitives, the stylized figures of folk art. "My dance form," Loring once said, "the musical form used in dance, does not parallel the music. It parallels it in spirit and in counts and that kind of thing, but the form is not equal, not parallel."³⁹ Copland's thumping music, as mechanical and insistent as a merry-go-round, offers a parallel to Loring's modernist populism. Neither celebrates *Billy's* unthinking folk or sentimentalizes the narrative; neither aims for local color or realism. The ballet is a radical retelling of the familiar story, within a framework of historical necessity. "Billy the Kid is not the hero of this ballet," Kirstein wrote before the premiere,

but rather . . . the times in which he lived. He was a heroic type, yet he was not unique. He was typical in so much as he reflected many others like him. He could not have existed except for his particular historical epoch. This was the peak of our expanding frontier, before the law came, and when your only security was in your trigger-finger. Billy represented the basic anarchy inherent in individualism in its most rampant form.⁴⁰

The ballet ends, not with Billy's death but, to quote Kirstein again, with a new start across the continent, . . . one more step achieved in the necessary orderings of the whole generation's procession. It's a

flag-raising, more than a funeral. Billy's lonely wild-fire energy is replaced by the group force of the many marchers.⁴¹

Over the years this critical edge has been lost.

In later years Kirstein put the ballet out of his mind. "I don't recall much about *Billy*," he told Vivian Perlis, "because I don't want to. I didn't like what the ballet became after I agreed to let Ballet Theatre do it."⁴² Kirstein apparently never forgave Loring for abandoning Ballet Caravan for Ballet Theatre and taking *Billy* away from him.⁴³ But Kirstein remained devoted to Copland. In 1941 he produced a second Caravan work to the composer's music—*Time Table*, set to *Music for the Theater*, with choreography by Antony Tudor.⁴⁴ In 1945, from Third Army Headquarters in Germany, he wrote Copland, asking for a ballet "that will be the first thing I will produce on kissing native shores."⁴⁵ Kirstein returned to the subject the following year, proposing a ballet, to be choreographed by Balanchine, that would be "nothing more (or less) than an absolute musical work."⁴⁶ In 1953, he proposed yet another project, this one for Jerome Robbins, who had choreographed *The Pied Piper*, to Copland's *Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra*, for the New York City Ballet in 1951.⁴⁷ Finally, in 1954, as managing director of City Center, Kirstein produced Copland's opera *The Tender Land*, which Robbins directed. Kirstein never lost his admiration for the composer of Ballet Caravan's finest work.⁴⁸

When *Billy* came into the world, Americana was not synonymous with what Richard Taruskin has called "an ingratiating white-bread-of-the-prairie idiom that could be applied ad libitum to the higher forms of art."⁴⁹ For artists and intellectuals associated with the Left, an American subject, even a western subject, did not necessarily call for celebration. Doris Humphrey's *New Dance Trilogy* (1935–36) and Martha Graham's *Chronicle* (1936) and *American Document* (1938) were all deeply critical of American life, although they revealed a tendency toward abstraction and avoided the literal representation of American subject matter. Where the literal depiction of Americana did appear was in ballet, above all in works like *Union Pacific* (1934) and *Ghost Town* (1939), which had a score by Richard Rodgers, produced by the touring Ballet Russe companies, which were coming under fire for the absence of American works in their repertory.

Everything changed with the approach of World War II. Nostalgic visions of hearth and home emanated from the Office of War Information, to which leftists and New Deal liberals gravitated now that the United States and the Soviet Union were allies. In his 1941 State of the Union Address, President Roosevelt spoke of the "Four Freedoms," which Norman

Rockwell depicted in *The Saturday Evening Post* as rural America eating together, worshipping together, and comforting each other in the circumscribed space of the home. Audiences cheered performances of *American Legend* (1941), an Americana sampler that included a classic square dance choreographed by Agnes de Mille, who also danced a hoedown.⁵⁰ Modern dancers like Jane Dudley and Sophie Maslow, who had once choreographed odes to Lenin and championed the urban oppressed, now turned their eyes to Appalachia and choreographed dances with titles like *Harmonica Breakdown* (1941) and *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1941). Although visual artists were rapidly turning away from the figurative, choreographers—with the major exception of Balanchine—were embracing it, above all as a celebratory vision of America.

In 1942, four years to the day after the premiere of *Billy the Kid*, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo gave the first performance of *Rodeo*. Still in active repertory today, it was the quintessential Americana ballet; only *Fancy Free*, choreographed two years later by Jerome Robbins, surpassed it, although the America it depicted was urban—sailors on shore leave in wartime New York. Subtitled “The Courting at Burnt Ranch,” *Rodeo* was set in Texas, around 1900, an idyllic land of open spaces, cowboys, and their sweethearts. The ballet was by Agnes de Mille (niece of the Hollywood mogul), the music by Copland, the sets by Oliver Smith (who later designed *The Tender Land*), and the costumes by Kermit Love (of later Muppets fame). The program note described the ballet as follows:

Throughout the American Southwest, the Saturday afternoon rodeo is a tradition. On the remote ranches, as well as in the trading centres and the towns, the “hands” get together to show off their skill in roping, riding, branding, and throwing. . . .

The afternoon’s exhibition is usually followed by a Saturday night dance at the Ranch House. The theme of the ballet is basic. It deals with the problem that has confronted all American women, from earliest pioneer times, and which has never ceased to occupy them throughout the history of the building of our country: how to get a suitable man.

The material of the ballet is redolent of our American soil.⁵¹

De Mille’s protagonist is the Cowgirl, plucky, spunky, in love with the Head Wrangler; a tomboy in jeans who hangs around the corral and gets under foot, a misfit in dungarees who finally puts on a dress. “Everyone is stunned,” de Mille wrote in the libretto:

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The Wrangler steps forward to invite her to dance, but the [Champion] Roper pushes him aside and paces the girl into frenzies of brilliant footwork. She flushes and shines, giving as good as she takes, the star of the party. The Wrangler is . . . on the point of kissing her when he is intercepted by the Roper who decides to kiss her himself. . . . She falls into his arms with the happy recognition that it was he all along she has been wooing, if without knowing it.⁵²

It was an upbeat ballet, with a happy ending, “the Taming of the Shrew—cowboy style,” de Mille said, and audiences loved it.⁵³ When the ballet opened in New York, the house exploded in laughter and applause, and de Mille, who had insisted upon dancing the Cowgirl herself (to the dismay of the Ballet Russe management) took curtain call after curtain call. (She says twenty-two, her biographer seventeen.)⁵⁴

Outside the theater the war dragged on. In her memoir *Dance to the Piper*, de Mille recalled the atmosphere on the road with the Ballet Russe during the months leading up to the premiere:

July moved into August, August into September. The United States lost the Aleutians. Rommel had all but reached the Nile, the Japanese were hard upon New Zealand. We knitted and rehearsed and gossiped back across the continent in cars that were shunted aside to let trainloads of tanks take the right of way, and trainloads of men, some in uniform, but all with intent lost faces. . . . All of America was quickening, was affirming itself, was searching its heart.⁵⁵

De Mille’s own fiancé, Walter Prude, was shipped out. And as the curtain rose at the Met, the Battle of Guadalcanal was raging.⁵⁶ *Rodeo* expressed nostalgia for a settled, safe America; it celebrated the myth of a world that never was, a rural community untouched by the social and economic disruptions of the twentieth century.

Far more than *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo* is a folk ballet. Copland used folk tunes throughout, and as Howard Pollack points out, they typically appear in their entirety and in relatively traditional settings. The score also features original music in folk style, “to the point that one cannot be sure, without consulting the original sources, where a folk tune leaves off or resumes.”⁵⁷ De Mille worked much the same way, with certain dances coming directly from vernacular sources, with very little change. Among these was a “running set,” a classic square dance performed to the sound of clapping hands, running feet, and the cries of a caller. There was a tap cadenza, a hoedown, waltzes, the one-step, and a Texas minuet—the

fixings of a real Saturday-night shindig. Theater, not authenticity, was her goal. She was a born storyteller, a master of the quick character sketch. Abstraction was alien to her temperament; she wanted flesh-and-blood people, even if the picture of them was only skin deep. She used gesture brilliantly, the telling piece of stage business (like a squint or a slap) or gait (de Mille wanted her cowboys bowlegged) that conveyed what someone was all about. She could be very funny. However much she identified with the Cowgirl, she also poked fun at her—at the adoring way she gazed at the Chief Wrangler, at her awkwardness and lack of social graces, her stubbornness and bravado. The fun was gentle, because the Cowgirl dances her heart out and always tries again. De Mille's characters were American because they moved with an American inflection and accent, even if the dancers themselves were from all over Europe.⁵⁸

Riding movements added to the choreographer's American lexicon. De Mille had been working at them for years, long before she saw *Billy the Kid*. She described them as "neither realistic nor imitative."

When performed correctly they suggested the high vigorous emotions of riding. But they were very difficult because the dancer had always to look as though he were propelled by an unseen animal. . . . The very essence of the movement was shock, spasm and effort.⁵⁹

"Move from the solar plexus and back," she shouted at her would-be cowboys. "Think of athletes . . . of throwing a ball, from your feet, from your back, from your guts." De Mille rolled on the floor, "lurched, contorted, jack-knifed, hung suspended and ground [her] teeth," until she "broke them technically."⁶⁰ There was much that recalled modern dance—the use of parallel, the freedom of movement in the back and the spasmodic movements of the torso, the relaxed foot (because cowboys in boots don't point). The stylized roping gestures added to the American "feel" of the choreography.

Far more than *Billy*, *Rodeo* has the spectacular excitement of ballet. The cowboys fly across the stage in leaps; they jump, jog, and spin. De Mille packs the choreography with ballet steps—*chassés*, *fouettés*, *sissonnes*, and all kinds of multiple pirouettes. For all the cowboy overlay, the exuberance of the opening scene lies in her delivery of old-fashioned bravura, coupled with her sense of space. In an early version of the scenario she speaks of the characters being "dwarfed by space and height and isolation," adding, "One must be always conscious of the enormous land on which these people live and of their proud loneliness."⁶¹ Oliver Smith's backdrop for the opening scene, fences receding into the distance under a glowing red-orange sky, captured this vastness. But it comes across best

in the dancing—in the groups that sweep across the stage, one after another, jumping with exhilaration, circling, rushing down the diagonal, or moving in unison, in a thrilling demonstration of male power.⁶² Critics praised de Mille's craft. "In nothing she has previously done," wrote John Martin, "has Miss de Mille exhibited so much pure choreographic skill and resourcefulness."⁶³ Edwin Denby, writing in *Modern Music*, found the dances "full of quick invention . . . the best we've had on the prairie subject and the best Miss de Mille has done." He also commented on the ballet's sense of place, and how "the flavor of American domestic manners" was "especially clear in [its] . . . desert landscape." . . . "The dance, the music, the décor. . . each are drawn to that same local fact with affection; and so they have a mysterious unity."⁶⁴

Rodeo, to the extent that it was about the curbing of female independence, anticipated the postwar ideology that sent Rosie the Riveter back home. De Mille herself was divided. On the one hand, she really did believe that the Cowgirl—and ordinary women like her—could only find happiness as a wife and mother, whatever the pull of the open range. De Mille herself opted for something different. The granddaughter of social reformer Henry George, who advocated a single tax on land to eliminate poverty, she wanted it all—and pretty much got it. She married, had a son, and pursued a successful career as a ballet and Broadway choreographer. (Her first show, *Oklahoma!*, choreographed in 1943, grew out of *Rodeo* and, with its "dream ballet," was a turning point in Broadway history.) Nevertheless, *Rodeo* isn't about life on the ranch, it's about a girl trying to keep up with the guys, then outdancing them.

Nothing could be further from the heroine of Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring*. Graham calls her the Bride, although no marriage ceremony takes place. She stands with her Husbandman, a farmer, in the clearing of a half-built house, surrounded by kin, a pioneer woman on the brink of happiness but not entirely at peace with herself or her world. The work premiered in 1944 at the Library of Congress. It was Copland's third ballet on an American subject in a half-dozen years, and his best known, a prestigious commission from Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. The following year it opened in New York. Only days before, Copland had received the Pulitzer Prize, and the war in Europe had ended. Stories about "GI Joes" coming home began to replace the war news.⁶⁵ A paean to hearth, home, and the American heartland, to enduring American values and rural community, *Appalachian Spring* was an idyll of domesticity, and it caught the mood of the country brilliantly.

It didn't start out that way. In early drafts of the scenario (or "script," as Graham called it), it was closer to *American Document* and to Kirstein's

unproduced *Memorial Day*. Like *Memorial Day*, Graham's new work was about the Civil War; it had a fugitive slave character, references to Harper's Ferry, and a section, "Moment of Crisis," that echoed Kirstein's subtitle, "Dances for Democracy in Crisis." As in *American Document*, there was an Indian Girl/Pocahontas figure, the theme of religious fanaticism, and spoken texts (in this case, from the Book of Genesis), eliminated at Copland's suggestion.⁶⁶ The Civil War theme had contemporary as well as historical resonances. The Office of War Information, for instance, published posters linking the words of Abraham Lincoln about a world half-slave and half-free to the struggle against Nazi tyranny.⁶⁷ As Marta Robertson has pointed out, World War II "was central to Graham's initial concept of *Appalachian Spring*," and at one point she even called the



A "family" group from *Appalachian Spring*, 1944: (from left) Martha Graham (Bride), May O'Donnell (Pioneer Woman), Merce Cunningham (Revivalist), and Erick Hawkins (Husbandman). Photo by Chris Alexander. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

work "House of Victory."⁶⁸ In letters to Mrs. Coolidge, Graham spoke of her new work as part of the war effort, as meeting a civic responsibility. For example, on September 15, 1943 she wrote:

I also feel that I have an obligation at this time. I must do something for the world that is constructive in so far as it is within my small power to make it so. Either that or I should be doing some actual work to help the war. While my performances cannot be called entertainment as a more popular medium is, nevertheless there may be something in them that will permit people to use certain parts of themselves that are immortal to man. If I can make them feel alive and conscious of themselves for one instant, even though it has been through the means of what might be called tragedy in theatre then I have fulfilled my duty in part to the world at this time.⁶⁹

Despite the emphasis on domesticity and celebration, *Appalachian Spring* was a work of serious art. Unlike *Rodeo*, it had a dark undertow, anxieties tucked away and bursts of fanaticism that rippled the surface. To be sure, both were choreographed by women, who viewed their protagonists from a distinctly female perspective (and also identified with them). However, in both atmosphere and aspiration, *Appalachian Spring* is closer to *Billy the Kid* than *Rodeo*. All three celebrate the American experience, but where *Rodeo* is uniformly upbeat, "a lyric joke," as de Mille put it, *Appalachian Spring*, like *Billy the Kid*, discloses a netherworld of evil that threatens the American Eden.⁷⁰ The "House of Victory" scenario made this tension clear, juxtaposing sections of communal celebration—"Eden Valley," "Wedding Day," "The Lord's Day"—with those of loneliness and apocalypse—"Fear in the Night," "Day of Wrath," "Moment of Crisis."⁷¹ Graham's casting underscored this moral dimension. Yuriko, one of the original Followers, had been in a Japanese-American internment camp, and her presence in the cast represented a quiet challenge to racism here and abroad.⁷² As in *Billy*, space was a source of ambivalence. Bound up in the myth of the West and the epic of American expansion, the open space promised freedom, as Graham herself had suggested in a 1935 solo, *Frontier*. But it was also fraught with danger. In *Billy*, the range was a killing ground, where sheriffs served the cause of American expansion, clearing the land of its native peoples and desperados living outside a newly imposed law. In *Appalachian Spring*, the home—like the Bride's impending marriage—delimits the space of imaginative possibility. "This has to do with living in a new town," Graham wrote in an early script, "some place where the first fence has just gone up. . . . It should all by theatrical clarity add up to a sense

of place.”⁷³ For much of the action, the Bride gazes outward, scanning the world beyond that first fence, registering the separation between safety and freedom. Whatever the pull of the unknown, she never once steps outside the domestic space.

In creating the work’s sense of place, Graham was indebted to her collaborators. Both Copland and Noguchi shared her modernist vision, and the spare beauty of their contributions gave *Appalachian Spring* a distinction that set it apart from its predecessors—both Graham’s as well as Kirstein’s. Indeed, Kirstein’s dream of creating an American *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total art work that would rival Diaghilev’s all-Russian productions of *Petrouchka* and *Les Noces*, was more fully realized in *Appalachian Spring* than in any Ballet Caravan work, including *Billy the Kid*. In part, this reflected the quality of Graham’s imagination, her ability to see the “inner frame” or “bone structure” of her subject, to move from the historical particular to the “happenings [that] flow from generation to generation,” to create legends that seemed truer to life than any document.⁷⁴ Graham also had a refined sense of design. Although she eschewed sets until the mid-1930s, she reconceived the dancing body as a stylized, modernist object. Critics joked about her long tube-like costumes, which clung to the body and dramatized the expressive torso—a badge of identity for modern dance, as the tutu was for ballet.

Unlike Kirstein, Graham had little interest in painted decor, and when she began to use sets, they were functional and uncluttered, more concerned with space than with illustration and color. Now, thanks to Noguchi, her stage acquired a visual identity and became an artwork in its own right—analogue to the best of Diaghilev’s productions. Certain ideas for *Appalachian Spring* emanated from Graham herself. Among these was the Shaker connection; an early version of the scenario refers to the Mother’s “Shaker rocking chair”; another speaks of the climactic hymn as representing a “Shaker meeting,” while also referring to “the spare beauty of fine Shaker furniture” that “Grant Wood has caught . . . in some of his things”—a rare allusion by Graham to a painter.⁷⁵ Noguchi made the rocking chair referred to by Graham part of the set and used a minimal frame to suggest both a home in the making and the simplicity of Shaker objects to evoke the plainspoken men and women of Graham’s imagined America. “I attempted through the elimination of all non-essentials to arrive at an essence of the stark pioneer spirit,” Noguchi wrote.⁷⁶ Copland, for his part, incorporated one of the most famous Shaker hymns, “Simple Gifts,” into the music; in keeping with the more sober tone of the work (especially when compared to *Rodeo*), it was the only folk tune he used. In *Blast at Ballet*, Kirstein had likened Graham to “Shaker architecture and wood-

carving”; elsewhere, he compared her “individual expression at once beautiful and useful” to a “piece of exquisitely realized Shaker furniture or homespun clothing.”⁷⁷ Graham was certainly aware of what Kirstein was writing about her in the late 1930s. They had met a few years earlier, and according to her biographer, Agnes de Mille, “he became addicted.” He took to “hanging around,” wrote about her in a way that made no secret of his admiration, and as her few surviving letters to him make clear, she regarded him as a friend.⁷⁸ Kirstein missed the Washington and New York premieres of her new work. “Everyone says *Appalachian Spring* is glorious,” he wrote to Copland from Germany shortly after the first New York performance. “How I long to hear it.”⁷⁹ In 1947 and 1948 he commissioned Noguchi to design two works for Ballet Society. And in 1952, Edwin Denby wrote to Kirstein urging him “to go hard after *Appalachian Spring*” for the New York City Ballet.⁸⁰ For reasons that remain unclear, the revival never materialized.

Appalachian Spring was one of several Graham scores underwritten by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation in the early 1940s. Like Copland, the other recipients of Mrs. Coolidge’s largesse—Darius Milhaud (*Imagined Wing*), Paul Hindemith (*Herodiade*), Carlos Chávez (*Dark Meadow*), and Samuel Barber (*Cave of the Heart*)—were serious composers with varying inclinations toward modernism and identified with ballet.⁸¹ Their presence on Graham’s roster of composers signaled a major shift in her work since the late 1930s away from modern dance as a recital form toward a type of dance theater that had more in common with ballet of the period. In making that transition, Graham abandoned key tenets about the relationship of music and dance, as this was understood by modern dancers of the 1930s. Among these notions was the primacy of dance. As Graham wrote in 1937, describing the revolt of the moderns against the “ornamented forms of impressionistic dancing”: “Dance accompaniment and costume were stripped to essentials. Music came to be written on the dance structure. It ceased to be the source of the emotional stimulus and was used as background.”⁸² Graham’s influential music director, Louis Horst, who composed many of her early scores, elaborated: “We are now at a period where the dancer dominates—as she should—and has grown to be absolutely independent. She does the dance and creates the rhythm for it. She then gets a composer to write the music upon the form she has created. Naturally, this will make the music secondary.”⁸³ One can only speculate about the reasons for the shift in Graham’s musical taste in the late 1930s, and Kirstein’s part in it. Not only was he close to her in this period, but he had been urging her since 1935 to get rid of her “unmelodic and trivial” music.⁸⁴ In 1941, she commissioned *Punch and the*

Judy from Robert McBride, who had written the music for *Showpiece*, produced in 1937 by Ballet Caravan and choreographed by Erick Hawkins, a former Kirstein protégé who was now Graham's partner. Finally, in 1942, Hawkins approached Mrs. Coolidge, setting in motion the process that ultimately transformed Graham's repertory, aligning it musically with post-Diaghilev modernist ballet.

Although Graham had been stridently anti-ballet in the 1930s, her choreography for *Appalachian Spring* represented a melding of ballet, folk, and modern idioms analogous to *Billy the Kid* but rooted in modern dance. The Followers skip, circle, and jump with the lightness of ballet dancers and even wear soft ballet slippers. The Husbandman does pirouettes, *sissonnes*, attitude turns, and even barrel turns (a classical virtuoso jump for men), although they are frequently performed in parallel and the feet are sometimes flexed. The Bride's duets with the Husbandman feature lifts, and like a traditional *pas de deux* incorporate solos for the partners. Loring's riding step appears (Hawkins, who must have incorporated them into the Husbandman's role, was a Cowboy in the original *Billy*), and Graham seems to have lifted the Followers' cupped hand flutter from the dream scene in *Oklahoma!*, which de Mille had choreographed the previous year. Modified turnout is used throughout, and everyone joins hands in the culminating figure of a joyous square dance. Only Graham's solos are built on the signature movements of her technique, the falls and contractions that hint at the Bride's private anguish. As in virtually all of her works, Graham here is both the protagonist and hero of the drama; the narrative is her quest for knowledge. Indeed, even in *Appalachian Spring*, the most transparent of her mature works, the action may be taking place wholly in her mind. The title came from a phrase in "Powhatan's Daughter," the same section of Hart Crane's poem *The Bridge* that inspired the 1936 Ballet Caravan production *Pocahontas*, with a score by Elliott Carter.

"Ballet for Martha" was how Copland referred to *Appalachian Spring* before Graham decided upon a title, and he kept the phrase as a subtitle when the score was published. In his mind it belonged with *Billy* and *Rodeo*, despite the somewhat different technical emphasis. It had acquired both the character and the stature of an American *ballet*, a work that seemed to narrow—if not repair—the breach between ballet and modern dance. By 1944 such a rapprochement seemed to lie within the range of possibility. As early as the mid-1930s, much to Kirstein's annoyance, some modern-dance choreographers were referring to their longer group compositions as "modern ballets."⁸⁵ In 1941, critic George Beiswanger called for Ballet Theatre to absorb the Humphrey-Weidman dances into its pro-

posed "modern repertory" of American works.⁸⁶ In 1947 Lucia Chase wrote to Humphrey about acquiring *With My Red Fires* for the company or even choreographing a new work for Nora Kaye.⁸⁷ Ballet Society, which Kirstein founded with Balanchine in 1946 to further the development of "lyric theater" (Ballet Caravan and the American Ballet had collapsed in 1941) commissioned a work by Merce Cunningham, sets from Noguchi, and scores from Elliott Carter (*The Minotaur*, 1947), John Cage (*The Seasons*, 1947), Stravinsky (*Orpheus*, 1948), and others, in addition to presenting Gian Carlo Menotti's operas *The Medium* and *The Telephone* (the latter a world premiere) in 1947.

In this melding, Copland's Americana works played a key role. In different ways, *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring* each created a dance for Americans, a language and an idiom that summed up a liberal-left idea about nationality, provided a way of incorporating vernacular material into an "art" idiom (be it ballet or modern dance), and situating such work within the European modernist succession. By the late 1940s American subject matter would disappear, and many choreographers would abandon narrative altogether and, like Copland, embrace more opaque forms of expression. By then, they had no need to prove themselves. The Ballet Russe companies had lost their edge; the Diaghilev inheritance had run dry or been absorbed into national traditions. During his years in Paris, Copland "wouldn't have dreamed of missing a new ballet by Stravinsky. His works were the most interesting and sensational in the Diaghilev repertory. . . . The essential Russianness of those scores suggested to me that it might be possible to create an American atmosphere in music."⁸⁸ With Copland as their partner, Loring, de Mille, and Graham created a repertory that drew on Diaghilev's powerful legacy—transforming rather than imitating it, bending it to American needs and giving it an American inflection. In this undertaking Copland's work served as a model, the exemplar of an art that was both serious and accessible, that acknowledged vernacular traditions but treated them as elements of a fine art. If Jerome Robbins could write in 1945 that the ballet had put on "dungarees" and left the "hothouse [to] become in America a people's entertainment," it was in part because Copland had showed the way.⁸⁹ His music had helped American dance become a serious American art.

NOTES

1. Phillip Ramey, "Copland and the Dance," *Ballet News* 2, no. 5 (November 1980): 8. Text copyright *Ballet News* 1980; reprinted courtesy of *Ballet News*, with permission.
2. Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), p. 450.
3. For Bolm's collaborations with Carpenter, see Suzanne Carbonneau, "Adolph Bolm in America," in *The Ballets Russes and Its World*, ed. Lynn Garafola and Nancy Van Norman Baer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 227–32. See also the chapters on *The Birthday of the Infanta* and *Krazy Kat* in Howard Pollack, *Skyscraper Lullaby: The Life and Music of John Alden Carpenter* (Washington/London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).
4. For the genesis and reception of the ballet as well as a discussion of its evolution and later fate, see Pollack, *Skyscraper Lullaby*, chaps. 13 and 14.
5. During the 2002–2003 season, *Skyscrapers* was programmed by the American Symphony Orchestra, Leon Botstein, music director. The work is included on *Skyscrapers and Other Music of the American East Coast School*, London Symphony Orchestra, Kenneth Klein, Angel CDC-7 49263 2. However, as Pollack points out, the recording is not complete and lacks an "authentic, idiomatic ease in the jazzy passages." *Ibid.*, p. 247.
6. For a list of Graham's works, see Alice Helpern, "The Technique of Martha Graham," *Studies in Dance History* 2, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 1991): 36–49; for Tamiris, see Christena L. Schlundt, "Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career 1927–1955," *Studies in Dance History* 1, no. 1 (Fall–Winter 1989–1990): 70–154. For *Lull*, which Schlundt does not mention, see the program for her "Dance Recital" at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, April 7, 1929, Programs (Tamiris, Helen), Jerome Robbins Dance Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (hereafter DD-NYPL). Although the music that Tamiris used is not identified in the programs, Pollack, in his biography of Copland, suggests that *Sentimental Dance* was done to the piano piece *Sentimental Melody*; *Slow Dance* and *Olympus Americanus* to another piano work, *Passacaglia* (Howard Pollack, *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* [New York: Henry Holt, 1999], p. 154). Another early Tamiris work to Copland music, which neither Schlundt nor Pollack mentions, is *Dance on an Ancient Theme*, presented at Washington Irving High School, New York, February 20, 1932, in the Students Dance Recitals series.
7. Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 30.
8. For Page's career, see John Martin, *Ruth Page: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Dekker, 1977); Ruth Page, *Page by Page*, ed. Andrew Mark Wentink (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1978).
9. José Limón, *An Unfinished Memoir*, ed. Lynn Garafola, introduction by Deborah Jowitz (Hanover/London: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), pp. 21–22.
10. Jerome D. Bohm, "Ballet Series Is Opened Here by Ruth Page," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 2, 1936.
11. For Copland's description of the ballet and response to it, see Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), pp. 233–35.
12. For the radical dance movement in the 1930s, see Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928–1942* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), and Lynn Garafola, ed., "Of, By, and For the People: Dancing on the Left in the 1930s," *Studies in Dance History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1994), which also includes a selection of reviews by Edna Ocko, the preeminent left-wing dance critic of the 1930s. Founded in 1932, the Workers Dance League was an umbrella organization to further the development of workers' dance groups. The League sponsored concerts and contests (called Spartakiades) and included groups from Boston, Chicago, Newark, and Philadelphia, although New York was the

movement's center. In 1935 the Workers Dance League changed its name to the New Dance League, in an attempt to "dissociate itself from the amateurism that the term 'worker' was beginning to denote" (Graff, *Stepping Left*, p. 112). Two years later the New Dance League, the Dancers Association, and the Dance Guild amalgamated to form the American Dance Association, a political organization devoted to securing dancers' rights, promoting world peace, and fighting fascism. The New Dance Group, one of the original constituents of the Workers' Dance League, continues to offer classes in New York City. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the New Dance Group remained faithful to the League's progressive agenda.

13. See, for example, his review of Martha Graham, "Prejudice Purely," *New Republic*, April 11, 1934, 243–44, and his essay "Crisis in the Dance," *North American Review* (Spring 1937): 80–103. For an overview of Kirstein's career, see Nancy Reynolds, "In His Image: Diaghilev and Lincoln Kirstein," in Garafola and Baer, *The Ballets Russes and Its World*, pp. 291–311; for his connection with the Left, see Lynn Garafola, "Lincoln Kirstein, Ballet Caravan, and the 1930s," *Dance Research* (in press).

14. John Martin, "The Dance: The Ballet," *New York Times*, March 10, 1935. The season repertory included revivals of *Errante*, *Dreams*, and *Mozartiana*, all staged by Balanchine for his Paris-based company, Les Ballets 1933. *Errante* had music by Schubert ("Wanderer" Fantasy) and designs by Pavel Tchelitchew; *Dreams* (or *Les Songes*, its original French title), music by Antheil (replacing the original Milhaud score), and designs by Derain; *Mozartiana*, music by Tchaikovsky (Suite No. 4, "Mozartiana") and designs by Christian Bérard. The new works were the now classic *Serenade*, to Tchaikovsky's *Serenade* in C for String Orchestra (sets by Gaston Longchamp, costumes by Jean Lurçat); *Alma Mater*, to music by Kay Swift (sets by Eugene Dunkel, costumes by John Held, Jr.); *Reminiscence*, to music by Godard (designs by Sergei Soudeikine); and *Transcendence*, to Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz*, *Ballade*, and various Hungarian rhapsodies (sets by Longchamp, costumes by Franklin Watkins). For Martin's other reviews of the season, see "American Ballet Makes Its Debut," *New York Times*, March 2, 1935; "American Ballet Opens Second Bill," *New York Times*, March 6, 1935. For a sampling of criticism of the individual ballets, see Nancy Reynolds, *Repertory in Review: Forty Years of the New York City Ballet*, introduction by Lincoln Kirstein (New York: Dial, 1977), pp. 36–44.

15. For the American Ballet and Ballet Caravan, see Anatole Chujoy, *The New York City Ballet* (New York: Knopf, 1953), chaps. 5–8; *Thirty Years: Lincoln Kirstein's The New York City Ballet* (New York: Knopf, 1978), pp. 40–80; Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, pp. 36–62. See also Kirstein's two-part "Transcontinental Caravan," *Dance*, February 1939, 14–15; March 1939, 8, 38. The "Communism Is Americanism" slogan appeared on a card issued by the Communist Party during the 1936 campaign; it is reproduced in Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 840.

16. For a list of Kirstein's published writings, see Harvey Simmonds, Louis H. Silverstein, and Nancy Lassalle, *Lincoln Kirstein: The Published Writings 1922–1977: A First Bibliography* (New Haven: Yale University Library, 1978).

17. This information is culled from Kirstein's FBI file, released under the Freedom of Information Act, as well as a response dated March 23, 1953, to a Rockefeller Foundation request for name checks on several individuals, including Kirstein, associated with City Center (RF12, 200R, City Center, Box 392, Folder 3391). These and other connections are discussed in my *Dance Research* article, "Lincoln Kirstein, Ballet Caravan, and the 1930s," forthcoming.

18. The essay, "Notes on a Cowboy Ballet," is reproduced in *Aaron Copland: Selected Writings 1923–1972*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 239–41. A typescript of the same essay with the notation "EXCLUSIVE FEATURE" is in DD-NYPL, Clippings (*Billy the Kid*). Another typescript, in the Copland Collection (Box 200, Folder 19), has the following notation: "Ed. note: Mr. Copland's ballet 'Billy the Kid' will

have its first performance this Wednesday evening, May 24th, as one of the American Lyric Theatre Ballet presentations by the Ballet Caravan." Although Kostelanetz gives a 1938 date for this essay, it was probably written for the New York premiere of the ballet on May 24, 1939, at the Martin Beck Theatre. Copland reused some of this material in Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942*, pp. 278-80.

19. Kirstein, *Thirty Years*, p. 71.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71; Debra Hickenlooper Sowell, *The Christensen Brothers: An American Dance Epic* (Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), pp. 123-24. Both Lew and Harold Christensen were members of Ballet Caravan.

21. Chujoy, *New York City Ballet*, p. 92. Neither of these works was produced by Ballet Caravan, although Loring's *City Portrait* (1939) had a score commissioned from Brant, and the composer had orchestrated the Godard music for the American Ballet's *Reminiscence* (1935). Brant also wrote the music for *The Great American Goof*, which Loring choreographed for Ballet Theatre in 1940.

22. Lincoln Kirstein, "About 'Billy the Kid,'" *The Dance Observer*, October 1938, 116.

23. Nancy Reynolds, ed., *Ballet: Bias and Belief—Three Pamphlets Collected and Other Dance Writings of Lincoln Kirstein* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1983), pp. 59-67.

24. Lincoln Kirstein, "Martha Graham at Bennington," *The Nation*, September 3, 1938, 230.

25. Graham's letters from this period, all undated, are in the Lincoln Kirstein Papers, DD-NYPL, Box 6, Folder 101. Kirstein's detailed scenario for *Memorial Day*, with Jared French's designs, are in the Copland Collection at the Library of Congress. According to Vicki Goldberg, in a short article about the "sheaf of watercolor sketches" discovered by archivists sifting through the collection, the project dates from 1937 or 1938 ("A Dance in Aquarelle," *Civilization*, February-March 1998, 34). However, since the material is undated, it is impossible to establish its exact relationship to *Billy the Kid* and *American Document*. Why the project was dropped is a mystery. One possible reason is that Copland did not want to write the music; another, that Kirstein was unable to raise the funds to produce it; a third, that the conception was so grandiose as to be unworkable. My feeling is that Kirstein lost interest in the project early on, since he never bothered to recover French's sketches and include them in his donation of American Ballet and Ballet Caravan set and costume designs to the Museum of Modern Art (where French's *Billy the Kid* designs are still housed). I am grateful to Vicky Risner, who first brought the *Memorial Day* material to my attention and made it possible for me to borrow several images for the 1999 exhibition *Dance for a City: Fifty Years of the New York City Ballet* at the New-York Historical Society.

26. Kirstein, "Blast at Ballet" in Reynolds, *Bias and Belief*, p. 202. *The Minotaur*, with music by Naginski, was another project that failed to materialize, although Kirstein produced a ballet with the same title but music by Elliott Carter in 1947 for Ballet Society. A "dramatic ballet in two parts," the 1947 *Minotaur* had choreography by John Taras and designs by the Spanish artist Joan Junyer. Although "Blast at Ballet" was published in 1937, Kirstein clearly wrote much of it in 1936, the year that *Pocahontas* premiered.

27. Three of French's designs—"Alias as Guide," "Alias as Mexican," and "Alias as Sheriff"—are reproduced in Gail Levin, "Aaron Copland's America," in Gail Levin and Judith Tick, *Aaron Copland's America: A Cultural Perspective* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2000), pp. 82-83.

28. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942*, pp. 278-80. The scenario and "Notes on Billy the Kid's Character" are in the Eugene Loring Papers, DD-NYPL, Box 5 (Choreographic Notes: *Billy the Kid*). Also included among these materials are cast lists, floor plans, movement notes, a detailed synopsis, breakdown of scenes and time plot, and excerpts from books such as Theodore Roosevelt's *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail* (1896) and Agnes C. Laut's *Pilgrims of the Santa Fe* (1931). The abundance of materials would seem

to support Loring's contention that "Lincoln did not do the book. What he did was . . . [hand] me the book by Walter Noble Burns, *The Life and Times of Billy the Kid* . . . and in his gruff manner . . . said, 'See if you can make a ballet out of it.' . . . [T]he rest of the work is totally mine. . . . [T]here was no kind of real close connection between Kirstein and myself on it." Marilyn Hunt, interview with Eugene Loring, 1975, DD-NYPL, Oral History Archive, pp. 35-36 (hereafter Hunt-Loring). However, it is clear from various accounts that Kirstein conceived not only the idea for the ballet but also what might be termed its larger ideology. Although many standard reference works, including Gerald Goode's *The Book of Ballets: Classic and Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1939), Cyril W. Beaumont's *Supplement to Complete Book of Ballets* (London: Putnam, 1942), and Nancy Reynolds's *Repertory in Review*, list Kirstein as author of the ballet's book, no librettist is credited on the Caravan souvenir program or playbills. Chujoy, in the chronological checklist at the end of *The New York City Ballet*, credits Kirstein with authorship of all the Caravan libretti.

29. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942*, p. 284; Kirstein, "Martha Graham at Bennington," p. 230.

30. Kirstein, "About 'Billy the Kid,'" p. 116.

31. The playbill for the premiere at the Civic Theatre, Chicago, on October 16, 1938, is in the *Billy the Kid* clippings file, DD-NYPL. Playbills for other performances are in the American Ballet Caravan program file, DD-NYPL. For Loring's view of *Alias*, see Hunt-Loring, pp. 40-41.

32. Hunt-Loring, pp. 43-45. Howard Pollack's account of the collaboration (*Aaron Copland*, p. 321) draws on Richard Schottland's taped interview with Loring, also in the DD-NYPL, rather than Hunt's oral history; hence, the different wording.

33. Ann Barzel, "Ballet Caravan," *Dance*, December 1938, 36.

34. Richard Philp, "Billy the Kid Turns Fifty: An American Dance Document," *Dance Magazine*, November 1988, 42.

35. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts' Dance Division has a number of recordings of the ballet. The oldest footage was filmed by Ann Barzel in Chicago in 1938, although it was spliced together with footage of the 1940 Ballet Theatre production. Still, it is possible to tell the two productions apart because the 1938 one was shot from the house and the 1940 version from the wings. The ballet was produced by the "TV-Radio Workshop of the Ford Foundation" in 1953 and televised on *Omnibus*; this version had an introduction and voiceover by the choreographer. In 1976 the PBS series *Dance in America* telecast the ballet as performed by American Ballet Theatre.

36. The name of the company was later changed to American Ballet Theatre.

37. Hunt-Loring, p. 61.

38. John Martin, "The Dance: 'Billy the Kid,'" *New York Times*, May 28, 1939.

39. Hunt-Loring, p. 46.

40. Kirstein, "About 'Billy the Kid,'" p. 116.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900-1942*, p. 284.

43. In a letter to Copland written in November 1940, Kirstein explains that he is willing to sell the sets and costumes to Ballet Theatre, but not give them to the company as an outright gift; he also says that there is a good possibility that he will revive the ballet sometime soon. Kirstein makes some very disparaging remarks about Loring, who had left Ballet Caravan to join Ballet Theatre the previous year and presumably wanted to restage his most famous ballet (Kirstein to Copland, November 11, 1940, Copland Collection, Box 257, Folder 21). It should be noted that companies, not choreographers, owned the performance rights to ballets at this time.

44. *Time Table* premiered at the Teatro Municipal, Rio de Janeiro, on June 27, 1941, although an open dress rehearsal was held on May 29, 1941, at Hunter College before the

company's departure for South America. The ballet, according to Nancy Reynolds, "concerned wartime partings and reunions at a railroad station." Tudor told her: "I prefer to find music first and then look for an idea, since the other way around is terribly difficult. . . . This ballet was considered to be so 'American,' but you know we have armies in England, and it could just as well have happened there. I saw such things in World War I. And my costumes were roughly that period. The three girls were sort of flappers. It wasn't sad, because at the end a husband comes home just as the boyfriend leaves, on the same train" (quoted in Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, 63). See pp. 63–64 for reactions to the revival by the New York City Ballet in 1949.

45. Kirstein to Copland, June 16, 1945, Copland Collection, Box 257, Folder 21.

46. Kirstein to Copland, December 1, 1946, *ibid.*

47. Kirstein to Copland, June 25, 1953, *ibid.*

48. For Kirstein's heartfelt expression of thanks to Copland shortly before the premiere of *Billy*, which he praised as the finest score the company had ever had, see Kirstein to Copland, September 19, 1938, *ibid.*

49. Quoted in Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, p. 531.

50. Carol Easton, *No Intermissions: The Life of Agnes de Mille* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), pp. 172–73.

51. Program, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, Metropolitan Opera House, New York, October 16, 1942, DD-NYPL, Programs (Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo).

52. Agnes de Mille, "Rodeo," typescript, Agnes de Mille Collection, DD-NYPL, Box 36.

53. Agnes de Mille, "American Ballet by Agnes de Mille," typescript, *ibid.*

54. Agnes de Mille, *Dance to the Piper* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), p. 233; Easton, *No Intermissions*, p. 194.

55. De Mille, *Dance to the Piper*, p. 226.

56. "Heavy Jap Forces Shell Guadalcanal" and "Gaudalcanal Battle Rages; Major Sea Fight in Making" were the front-page headlines of the *New York Sun* on October 16 and 17, 1942, respectively.

57. Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, p. 367.

58. Casimir Kokich, the Head Wrangler, was Yugoslavian; Frederick Franklin, the Champion Roper, English; and Lubov Roudenko, who replaced de Mille, Bulgarian.

59. De Mille, *Dance to the Piper*, p. 218.

60. *Ibid.*

61. De Mille, "American Ballet."

62. The ballet returns periodically to the repertory of American Ballet Theatre, which acquired the performance rights in 1950. *American Ballet Theatre: A Close-Up in Time*, produced by WNET/13 in 1973, has a good production of Scene 1. Two photographs by Roger Wood, taken in England in 1950 (when American Ballet Theatre was on tour) are reproduced in Levin, "Aaron Copland's America," pp. 96–97.

63. John Martin, "'Rodeo' Presented by Ballet Russe," *New York Times*, October 17, 1942, p. 10.

64. Edwin Denby, "With the Dancers," *Modern Music* 20, no. 1 (November–December 1942): 53. Denby, who wrote the libretto for Copland's *The Second Hurricane* in 1936, began writing dance criticism for *Modern Music* the same year. During World War II, he replaced Walter Terry as the dance critic of the *New York Herald-Tribune*. Regarded as the finest dance critic of the period, Denby was an eloquent champion of Balanchine's early work.

65. In the *New York Times* the "Pulitzer Awards" were announced on the same front page with the triumphant headline, "The War in Europe Is Ended! Surrender Is Unconditional; V-E Will Be Proclaimed Today," May 8, 1945. For typical GI stories, see "From Khaki to Civvies: The Transition of GI Joe," *New York World-Telegram*, May 15, 1945.

66. Copland and Perlis, *Copland Since 1943*, p. 32; Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, pp. 394–95.

67. Foner, *Give Me Liberty!*, p. 867.

68. Marta Elaine Robertson, "'A Gift to be Simple': The Collaboration of Aaron Copland and Martha Graham in the Genesis of *Appalachian Spring*," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1992, p. 132. For an analysis of Graham's scenarios and the evolution of the characters and action, see chapter 3, "*Appalachian Spring*: The Biography of a Ballet."

69. Graham to Coolidge, September 15, 1943, uncatalogued box, joint materials related to *Appalachian Spring* from both the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Collection and the Music Division's Copland Collection, Library of Congress. For Graham's correspondence with Coolidge (although not this letter), see Wayne D. Shirley, "For Martha," *Ballet Review* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 64–95.

70. De Mille, "American Ballet."

71. For a list of the sections, see Robertson, "'A Gift to be Simple,'" Table 4, p. 209.

72. For Yuriko, see the interview in Robert Tracy's *Goddess: Martha Graham's Dancers Remember* (New York: Limelight, 1997), pp. 100–11.

73. Martha Graham, "Name? Version 1," script sent by Graham to Copland in summer 1943. Copland Collection, Box 255, Folder 22.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Martha Graham, "House of Victory," script sent to Copland, May 16, 1943; and "Name? Version 1." Copland Collection, Box 255, Folder 22. For the connection with Grant Wood, see Levin, "Aaron Copland's America," pp. 99–100.

76. Quoted in Robert Tracy, *Spaces of the Mind: Isamu Noguchi's Dance Designs* (New York: Limelight, 2000), p. 44. *Appalachian Spring* was filmed in 1959 with Graham as the Bride, Stuart Hodes as the Husbandman, Bertram Ross as the Revivalist, and Matt Turney as the Pioneer Woman. A video of the recording is available on *Martha Graham—An American Original in Performance*, distributed by Kultur.

77. *Blast at Ballet*, in Reynolds, *Bias and Belief*, p. 249; *Martha Graham: The Early Years*, ed. Merle Armitage (Los Angeles, 1937; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1978), p. 32.

78. Agnes de Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 229, 239. For Graham's letters to Kirstein, see note 26 above.

79. Kirstein to Copland, June 16, 1945. Copland Collection, Box 257, Folder 21.

80. Denby to Kirstein (1952). Kirstein Papers, DD-NYPL, Box 4, Folder 69.

81. Milhaud composed numerous ballets in the 1920s and 1930s, including *L'Homme et son Désir* (1921) and *La Création du Monde* (1923) for the Ballets Suédois, *Le Train Bleu* (1924) for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, *Salade* (1924) for the Soirées de Paris, and *La Sagesse* (unproduced) for Ida Rubinstein. Hindemith's best-known ballets were *Nobilissima Visione* (or *St. Francis*) (1938) for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and *The Four Temperaments*, commissioned by Balanchine in 1938 for the American Ballet, although not produced until 1946. Chávez's *H. P. (Horse Power)* was produced by (although not written for) Catherine Littlefield's Philadelphia-based civic ballet company in 1932.

82. "Graham 1937," in Armitage, *Martha Graham*, p. 86.

83. Quoted in "Lloyd 1935," Armitage, *Martha Graham*, pp. 89–90.

84. Lincoln Kirstein, "The Dance: Some American Dancers," *The Nation*, February 27, 1935, 258.

85. Lincoln Kirstein, "Crisis in the Dance," *North American Review*, Spring 1937, 99.

86. Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 228.

87. *Ibid.*, pp. 228–30.

88. Ramey, "Copland and the Dance," p. 10.

89. Jerome Robbins, "The Ballet Puts on Dungarees," *New York Times*, October 14, 1945.

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