

APPALACHIAN SPRING – AARON COPLAND

Copland's brilliant ballet score, entitled Appalachian Spring, won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1945. The following article deals with the suite for full orchestra, but the majority of the observations would be applicable for the version for 13 players.

The beginning of Appalachian Spring must be played with the utmost calm.

At #2, I conduct in 2, which I believe helps keep the music from bogging down, letting the melody flow.

At #5, I push the tempo ever so slightly, then relax a bit 6 bars after #5. The last phrase has the same sort of calm as the beginning.

At #6, a decision needs to be made as to the bowing. I prefer another down bow on the 3rd beat, with a free change on the fermata.

In the 3rd bar after #6, I think that rather than cutting off the violins and violas, they will find a way to lift together and go on to the next bar.

For the passages in the woodwinds starting at 5 bars after #6, I prefer that the woodwinds articulate their 8th notes, rather than play a so called legato-staccato. The notes can be somewhat longer than a short, perky staccato, but clearly articulated.

3 bars before #7, notice that the 8th notes are grouped in 3 note triads.

At #7, same bowing as at #6.

For 8 bars after #7, again, I prefer articulated 8th notes.

The rapid change from pizzicato to arco at 5 bars after #7 is awkward. I have been advised that the best bowing is up, down, up, for these 3 bars. Another possible solution is to have the inside players play the arco parts and the outsides play the pizzicato parts.

At #8, for all entrances, heavy and well articulated quarter notes are effective.

The chorale at #9 must not drag; the 8th notes drive the tempo, and the chorale must stay in tempo. Conducting in half notes is an option.

4 bars after #11, free change on the long note, followed by an up bow on the second 8th note

7 bars after #11, no free change on the long A; lift at the end of the bar.

5 bars after #12, continue with a robust sound, marcato.

Starting 2 bars before #13, accents must be observed, even exaggerated.

1 bar before #14, the tempo can relax, and can be conducted in 2.

#15 can be conducted in 4.

3 bars before #16, loud enough so that the pp is noticeably softer.

The tempo at #16 can be set also with #17 in mind, as #17 is strictly twice as slow. The 8th notes I believe are most effective played with clear articulation.

The clarinet at #17 can play 2 distinct 1 bar phrases.

3 bars before #19 must be played quickly enough to allow #19 to then be slower.

#19, passionate and well accented.

2 bars before #20, I like to hold back the end of the bar ever so slightly, also 2 bars before #21.

#20, woodwinds push just a bit, more of an a tempo, also the same at #21.

The pickup in the oboe to 4 bars after #21 needs to be the same length as the two 8h notes in the next bar.

Clarinet 1 bar before #22 can stretch the written A just a tiny bit.

Flute at #22 can push the tempo ever so slightly, then relax a bit at the pickup to the 3rd bar.

Note that the low B in the bassoon 5 bars before #23 is difficult to play quietly

The section at #23 contains an alternate part for A clarinet, which makes these passages easier to play. It's necessary to have this tempo quite lively - quarter note = 132 as asked by Copland is brisk - perhaps a notch or two slower, 126 or 128. Crisp articulations are the norm here,

At one bar before #24, begin the accents on the off beats, which are prevalent at #28.

At #28, I do about quarter note = 116 or 120. Make a clear distinction between accents on the beat, and those off the beat. Playing less on the unaccented notes can lead to more contrast.

At #29, everyone playing the rhythmic figure on the last 2 beats can exaggerate short - long. This passage can be played in a real "country style".

For violins and violas at #30, I suggest a down bow on each new group of 16th notes, and then two up bows on the and of 3 to the downbeat of the 4. Watch the change of the rhythmic pattern in the 3rd bar.

At #31, the percussion part labeled "tabor" can be played on a field drum without snares.

At #31, don't let the tempo drag.

I suggest penciling in a D sharp for first violins in the second bar of #33. Notice that the pickup to 3 bars after #33 begins what is essentially two bars of 6/4.

In 5 bars after #33, there are mistakes in the trombone parts - their notes should read A, B, C sharp, E, the same as the bass part.

One bar before #35, the intonation in the winds often needs attention - I would make sure that the clarinet's concert D sharp is not too high.

The cutoff of 1 bar before #35 is also the downbeat of #35. Be sure that the passage from #35 to #37 is well rehearsed. The dynamic at #35 is *p*, with the *sfz* not overdone, allowing the charm of the music to come through.

I go into two 2 bars before #37, and stay in tempo until the 8th notes in the violas are well established, then push the tempo. It's not necessary to overdo the accelerando to get to quarter note = 92. The tempo is actually predicated, I think, on a tempo that will enable the basses to play #39.

Starting at #38, all "legato staccatos" are well articulated.

5 bars after #38, there is a mistake in the trumpet parts. According to the harmony, the parts for these 3 bars are in C for these bars. Notice that the parallel passage at 3 bars before #48 is in the correct key.

#41 is very effective if everyone starts softer and makes a crescendo as written to #42.

I suggest conducting #43 in 4, which helps set up the ensuing passages of changing meters.

#44 is best conducted in 1

At #46, the 2nd violins and harp must be very steady, which will enable the flute to fit in his/her part. At one particular rehearsal that I did, the flutist was having difficulty playing in time at the 3/4 bar, so I rehearsed this passage under tempo, encouraging her to listen to the 2nd violins. She had no problem then when we played the passage in tempo.

The passage at #48 can be difficult for good ensemble. Best to keep the gestures simple and encourage the violins to listen to the 8th notes in the violas and cellos.

6 bars after #48 is an important audition passage for xylophone.

3 bars after #49 is similar to the earlier passage at #43, conducted in 4 to set up the quarter note.

#50 mark the rests with small beats, and then give a strong ictus on beat 4.

I would be sure that the 2nd bar of #50 is not too slow, since there follows a rit and meno mosso.

At #52, I suggest subdividing the beat in quarter notes, which helps the basses with their syncopations.

2 before #53, it's probably unnecessary to observe the fermata for the bassoon, as the note is long enough without it. It's interesting to note that the bassoon has a similar function at the end of the first movement of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, as the orchestra stops, leaving the bassoon holding a B, which then moves to a C.

At #54, I encourage a warm and full string sound, with each subsequent passage a little softer. I have the players save their bow at the mp, and then play another down bow on the pp, which creates a lovely up pp bow on the A flat.

At #55, the articulation and slurs in the clarinet need attention. I suggest articulating the second C in the third bar, and then slurring from the third C. Then at 2 bars before #56, slur the two 16th notes into the B flat, followed by articulating the second and third B flats.

As earlier, I suggest articulating the 8th notes clearly 3 bars before #57.

As Copland writes, #57 can move just a little bit.

2 bars after #58, mf substantially softer than forte. The high register of the horn makes it difficult to balance this passage.

Rehearsal #59 and rehearsal #60 are not placed on phrases, which is misleading for people counting rests. If possible, I would suggest changing them, placing #59 one bar later, and #60 one bar earlier.

Make sure that at the cadence bar of each of these phrases that the second quarter note functions as a pickup to the next phrase, and not run together.

At #61, the basses and cellos need to play their last 16th note with good ensemble. It may be necessary to rehearse them by themselves.

#62 should be clear - make sure that everyone counting rests knows that you're in one if you decide to conduct the passage in this way.

I extend the pickup to #64 slightly to get into the new tempo.

2 bars before #65 can be held back just a bit.

I have the first violins and violas play the passage at #65 "as it comes", with two up bows at 1 bar before #66, which accentuates the pickup to the second phrase. This bowing is somewhat unorthodox, but I think it works well.

1 bar before #67 I think should have a very short fermata, if any at all, as the first horn is perched up on a high G.

The older printing of the score at #67 read quarter note = 66, as opposed to quarter note = 96 in the newer edition; Copland's own recordings are around quarter note = 56 to 63.

At #67 and #68, I prefer the first violins to play on the D string rather than the G string, which makes playing on the G string at #70 that much more effective.

Before #68 and #69, I'd suggest that the strings rearticulate the half notes.

At #67, #68, #69, and #70, I like the phrase to be felt basically in two 2 bar groups, and then one 4 bar group.

Note that the cadence before #68 resolves from G to F, and is marked poco rit; the cadence before #69 resolves from G to A, and is marked poco rit; but the cadence that resolves from G to C is marked rit. The first two resolve in a sort of amorphous fashion, but the feeling of finality when the cadence resolves to C is unmistakable. The rit should be noticeably more substantial than the other two cadences.

The sound at #70 must be warm and committed, as if we finally have found the proper tonality, and the feeling of, as Copland writes, "At the end, the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house".

At #71 in the older printing of the score and parts the tempo was marked half note = 54; the newer printing has 69. Copland's recordings are closer to 54.

The passage at #71 in half notes I believe is meant to be somewhat more expansive, thus written in half notes. The first violins can play in position, starting on the D string. The flute must lend its color, without playing in a soloistic manner, and with just a hint of vibrato.

2 bars before #73, in 2, then bring out the moving parts in the strings.

Maestro Otto Werner Mueller suggests conducting the last 3 bars in a manner that the audience doesn't see the conductor showing the cues for the glockenspiel and harp.