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MULTIMEDIA REVIEW

Keeping Score: Copland and the American Sound. David Kennard and Joan Saffa, directors. San Francisco Symphony DVD, 2006.

Along with *Beethoven's Eroica* and *Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, Copland and the American Sound* is one of three fifty-five-minute "documentary-style episodes" created by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony in conjunction with PBS that first aired on national television in November 2006. Now released individually on DVD, all three shows are part of a larger K-12 initiative, *Keeping Score,* that aims to educate young people about classical music.

Produced and directed by David Kennard and Joan Saffa, *Copland and the American Sound* has more of the trappings of a documentary than do *Beethoven's Eroica* and *Stravinsky's Rite of Spring;* and it is as a documentary that the film falls short, notwithstanding an array of interesting photos and film clips. Thomas acknowledges the influences of Tin Pan Alley, jazz, and Jewish music on Copland, but aside from Gershwin, there's no mention of any other serious American composer, including Copland's teacher Rubin Goldmark. Nor do we learn about such European influences as Stravinsky. Such gaps and lapses are not helped by the fact that the members of the San Francisco Symphony, rather than historians, provide the commentary.

The film also avoids such potentially provocative aspects of Copland's life and career as his homosexual relationships and his left-wing politics (which led to public defamation during the 1950s). True, the script alludes to his "progressive politics" and mentions, moreover, "his companion, Victor Kraft," further stating (even more obliquely), "Everything about him marked him as an outsider, yet somehow he found a way to be true to himself, his art, his society." Given the probable demographics of the episode's intended audience (middle and high school), it seems like a lost opportunity not to use Copland's life as a means through which to say something about the American Left in the twentieth century and perhaps, too, about the lives and contributions of gay Americans.

That the episode mentions no work later than the Third Symphony constitutes its more glaring weakness as a documentary—nor does it discuss Copland's work in Hollywood or his conducting career. Rather, the program seems almost entirely focused on tracing the composer's stylistic evolution from the Piano Concerto to *Appalachian Spring.*

The film succeeds better as music appreciation. A charming host, Thomas exudes great affection for Copland's music and is often eloquent in his assessment of it. "It's so big and defiant," he says of the Piano Variations, "and it seems to sum up everything you're feeling yourself when you're young." "Listen to this music," he states apropos of *Appalachian Spring:* "It's a journey through struggle to resolution and triumph." He helpfully emphasizes continuities while observing Copland's evolution, pointing to the jazziness of the Piano Variations (wonderfully illustrated by a bassist playing his part in the work's orchestral transcription) and noting similarities between the Variations and *El Salón México:* "And how about the most basic idea of both pieces: music with excited bumpy interruptions."

Most of the musical excerpts are played by the orchestra, sometimes with images from the visual arts—there's a splendid montage of art deco skyscrapers and modernist paintings accompanying an excerpt of the Piano Concerto—other times with arresting close-ups of the musicians (the woodwind playing is particularly brilliant). Thomas, an accomplished pianist, plays some of the musical examples at the keyboard. Unfortunately, the program, while including almost all of *Fanfare for the Common Man* and a healthy chunk of *Appalachian Spring,* presents no single movement or work from beginning to end, a grave limitation given the stated intention of educating young people about classical music. The photography, editing, and sound are all of a high standard.

Copland and the American Sound seems geared, as mentioned, to middle and high school students. Because the episode lasts fifty-five minutes, teachers will not be able to get through an entire episode in one fifty-minute class, although one can fast forward through the first five minutes or so. All three episodes (in particular the excellent Stravinsky episode) could be used at the college level as well—for music majors and nonmajors alike—although as regards the Copland episode, instructors might well prefer PBS's *American Masters* documentary (1985) devoted to that composer.

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