

Aaron Copland

b. November 14, 1900; Brooklyn, NY

d. December 2, 1990; New York City

### **El Salon Mexico**

*First sketched during a trip to Mexico during the autumn of 1932, **El Salon Mexico** was ultimately orchestrated in 1936. It was introduced in Mexico City on August 27, 1937; Carlos Chavez conducted the Orquesta Sinfonica de Mexico in a concert at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. This 11-minute work is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two Bb clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, four percussionists (bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, wood block, guiro, temple blocks, tambourine, xylophone), piano and strings. This music last appeared on our series under Lukas Foss during January of 1990.*

Following a series of abstract compositions, Copland's first widely successful orchestral work, *El Salon Mexico*, created the intellectual-popular dichotomy that has been a part of the composer's image throughout his maturity. Recalling that he felt "that it was time to try something new," Copland explained (*Copland/ 1900-1942*):

"*El Salon Mexico* had been 'in the works' since my first trip to Mexico in 1932 when I came away from that colorful dance hall in Mexico City with Chavez. I had read about the hall for the first time in a guidebook about tourist entertainment: 'Harlem type night-club for the peepul, grand Cuban orchestra, Salon Mexico. Three halls: one for people dressed in your way, one for people dressed in overalls but shod, and one for the barefoot.' A sign on a wall of the dance hall read: 'Please don't throw lighted cigarette butts on the floor so the ladies don't burn their feet.' A guard, stationed at the bottom of the steps leading to the three halls, would nonchalantly frisk you as you started up the stairs to be sure you had checked all your 'artillery' at the door and to collect the 1 peso charged for admittance to any of the three halls. When the dance hall closed at 5:00 A.M., it hardly seemed worthwhile to some of the overalled patrons to travel all the way home, so they curled themselves up on chairs around the walls for a quick two-hour snooze before going to a seven o'clock job in the morning.

"I realized that it would be foolish for me to attempt to translate some of the more profound sides of Mexico into musical sounds--the ancient civilizations or the revolutionary Mexico of our own time--for that, one really had to know a country well. But my thoughts kept returning to that dance hall. It wasn't so much the music or the dances that attracted me as the spirit of the place. In some inexplicable way, while milling about in those crowded halls, I had felt a live contact with the Mexican 'people' --that electric sense one gets sometimes in far-off places, of suddenly knowing the essence of a people--their humanity, their shyness, their dignity and unique charm. I remember quite well that it was at such a moment I conceived the idea of composing a piece about Mexico and naming it *El Salon Mexico*. But to have an idea for a piece of music is far from having the piece itself! I began (as I often did) by collecting musical themes or tunes out of which a composition might eventually emerge. It seemed natural to use popular Mexican melodies for thematic material; after all, Chabrier and Debussy didn't hesitate to help themselves to the melodic riches of Spain. There was no reason I should not use the tunes of the Hispanic land on our southern doorstep. My purpose was not merely to quote literally, but to heighten without in any way falsifying the natural simplicity of Mexican tunes..."

Marc Neikrug

b. September 24, 1946; New York

### **Clarinet Concerto**

*Begun around 2004 and completed for Todd Levy in May of 2009, this concerto of five linked movements accompanies a solo B-flat clarinet with an orchestra consisting of pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, tuba, four percussionists (performing on*

*vibraphone, marimba, xylophone, crotales, tam-tam, large and small suspended cymbal, triangle, chime tree, claves, maracas, tom-toms and six tuned gongs), harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings. These are the premiere performances of this music.*

Presently living in Santa Fe as the Artistic Director of the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Marc Neikrug is a noted pianist and composer as well as a champion of new music. The son of cellist George Neikrug and the composer/painter Olga Zundel, he grew up in Los Angeles and later studied in Detmold, Germany, with opera composer Giselher Klebe. While completing numerous commissions, Neikrug served as Special Consultant for Contemporary Programs to the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra for seven years. He has appeared as Pinchas Zukerman's keyboard collaborator in concerts throughout the world.

"Whether writing in an atonal or a chromatically tonal idiom," writes Severine Neff in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, "Neikrug is above all a harmonist. His orchestral works, which move in long, carefully orchestrated chordal blocks punctuated by virtuoso, repetitive fragments of melody, reveal the influence of the Danish composer Per Nørgård [b. 1932]...Neikrug's best-known work is the theater piece *Through Roses* (1970-80), which dramatizes the nightmares of a Jewish violinist who survived in a concentration camp by playing for members of the SS, the film version [featuring Maxmillian Schell] received prizes at both the Besançon Film Festival (1981) and the International Film and Television Festival, New York (1982)."

The composer graciously provides the following comments:

"I have always been particularly attracted to the clarinet. It is one of the few instruments with the range, versatility, depth of expression, and power to be a commanding solo voice. I wrote a very early clarinet concerto and pieces for clarinet and piano. About five years ago I worked on this concerto for a project which never materialized and left it unfinished.

"More recently Todd Levy became familiar with my music and when he heard there was a partial clarinet concerto he encouraged me to complete it for him.

"After four decades of composing and maturing as a person I find that I don't compose music that reflects one or another particular feeling. Rather, I strive to create music which is a multi-layered, multi-emotional expression of the myriad of feelings encountered throughout each and every day. It is the shared recognition of these feelings which creates communication. So the concerto is at times lyrical, passionate, aggressive, contemplative, and ethereal. Sometimes even all at once.

"The *Clarinet Concerto* is in five movements, which follow each other without pause. The entire piece derives from a set of intervals presented by gongs in the opening. They are a connected set of perfect fourths and augmented fourths. This forms the basis for each movement, but with each having its own individual manner of evolving.

"The first movement is a dramatic presentation of the material, the second movement is a scherzo; the third is a manic and aggressive /propulsive accumulation of energy which leads to a slow lyrical fourth movement. The finale expands the colorful palette until finally dissolving back into nothing.

"The solo clarinet protagonist is always the main focus and is sometimes 'expanded' into a 'super clarinet' by using the orchestra clarinets as an addition."

John Adams  
b. February 15, 1947; Worcester, MA

### ***Doctor Atomic Symphony***

*Written in 2007 on music from his 2005 opera **Doctor Atomic**, this symphony is the product of a three-way commission between the Carnegie Hall Corporation, the Saint Louis Symphony*

*Orchestra and BBC Radio 3 for the BBC Proms. Dedicated to David Robertson, Music Director of the Saint Louis SO, the work enjoyed its first performance with composer John Adams leading the BBC SO at London's Royal Albert Hall on August 21, 2007. This single-movement, 25-minute work utilizes piccolo, two flutes, three oboes (third doubling English horn), three clarinets (second doubling E-flat clarinet, third doubling bass clarinet, three bassoons (third doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets (fourth doubling piccolo trumpet), three trombones, tuba, timpani, four percussionists (chimes, crotales, glockenspiel, bass drum, snare drum, thundersheet, tam-tams, suspended cymbals, tuned gongs), harp, celesta and strings. The work enjoys its first performance on our series.*

A leading force of American art music, John Adams began as a New Englander who played clarinet as a youth and subsequently received a pair of degrees from Harvard College, where he studied with composers Leon Kirchner, Roger Sessions, David Del Tredici and Earl Kim. He moved immediately (1971) to the San Francisco Bay area, where he spent a decade on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory and developed the San Francisco Symphony's "New and Unusual Music" series. Adams' association with that orchestra and its Music Director Edo de Waart, became even closer from 1978 to 1985, during which time he was the orchestra's New Music Adviser and then Composer-in-Residence.

Fascination with contemporary media led Adams to create works involved with video, live electronics and synthesizers. He has, however, scored tremendous successes with traditional orchestral resources: *Harmonium* (1981) for chorus and large orchestra, *Grand Pianola Music* (1982), *Harmonielehre* (1985) and his operas, most notably *Nixon in China* (1985-87), *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1990-91) and *Doctor Atomic* (2004-05). In 1991, an American Symphony Orchestra League survey of major orchestras already revealed John Adams as the most frequently performed living American composer.

Focused on the final hours prior to the first atomic bomb test at Alamogordo, New Mexico in July of 1945, *Doctor Atomic* was a project suggested by Pamela Rosenberg, General Director of the San Francisco Opera, which subsequently commissioned the work. With staging by Adams' frequent collaborator, Peter Sellars and under the musical direction of Donald Runnicles, the opera enjoyed a greatly acclaimed premiere in San Francisco on October 2, 2005.

The success of that premiere and subsequent productions, led a number of organizations to envision a symphonic distillation of Adams' affecting music. Commissioned by groups in New York City, Saint Louis and London, the new one-movement symphony was first performed under the composer's direction by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London's Royal Albert Hall on August 21, 2007.

Of this effort, John Adams writes: "The symphony is cast in a sustained, 25-minute single-movement arch, not unlike the Sibelius Seventh Symphony, a work that has had an immense effect on [my] compositional thinking. The opening, with its pounding timpani and Varèse-like jagged brass fanfares, conjures a devastated post-nuclear landscape. The frenzied 'panic music' that follows comes from one of Act Two's feverish tableaux that evoke the fierce electrical storm that lashed the test site in the hours before the bomb's detonation. The ensuing music is taken from moments that describe the intense activity leading up to the test. One hears the US Army General Leslie Groves, here impersonated in the boorish trombone music, berating both the scientists and his military subordinates, music that gives way to the ritual 'corn dance' of the local Tewa Indians. The symphony concludes with an instrumental treatment of the opera's most memorable moment, a setting (originally for baritone voice, here played by solo trumpet) of John Donne's holy sonnet, 'Batter my heart, three person'd God' This is the poem that the physicist hero of the opera, J. Robert Oppenheimer, loved and that inspired him to name the desert test site 'Trinity.'"

When interviewer Thomas May asked if the composer if he utilized any passages from Oppenheimer's letters, Adams replied: "No, I didn't use any[thing] from Oppenheimer's letters, but at the end of the first act I set John Donne's sonnet, 'Batter my heart, three-personed God' as a soliloquy for Oppenheimer. He is alone—a rare moment of solitude for him—and feels a very deep dissonance within himself over the fact that here he is bringing forth this terrible weapon,

something that is going to introduce an unknowable amount of pain and destruction into the world. The Donne sonnet, which Oppenheimer later said prompted him to name the test site 'Trinity,' is a poem of almost unbearable self-awareness, an agonistic struggle between good and evil, darkness and light.

[The poem:

**Holy Sonnet No. 14**

Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you  
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;  
 That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend  
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.  
 I, like an usurped town, to another due,  
 Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.  
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
 But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.  
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,  
 But am betrothed unto your enemy:  
 Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,  
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,  
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.]

"The poet speaks as one whose soul 'like an usurped town,' has been taken captive by dark forces—the dark 'shadow' of his own self. The real God must come forth and batter him and break him and bend him and destroy him, and make him whole and new again. It's a very profound moment in the opera. Later, after I'd set this sonnet to music, I read in a new biography of Oppenheimer, *American Prometheus*, how Oppenheimer went into a deep depression after the initial euphoria of the bomb's success wore off."

George Gershwin  
 b. September 26, 1898; Brooklyn  
 d. July 11, 1937; Hollywood

**An American in Paris**

*Created in Paris and Vienna during the spring of 1928, An American in Paris was introduced in New York on December 13, 1928 by Walter Damrosch and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. This 17-minute tone poem employs three flutes (third doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, alto, tenor and baritone saxes, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, four percussionists (bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, triangle, snare drum, tom-toms, woodblock glockenspiel, xylophone, tuned motor horns in A, B, C and D), celesta and strings. This work was last performed on this series in April of 1998, led by Lukas Foss.*

Commissioned to write a work for the New York Symphony Society, Gershwin responded with a programmatic tone poem that reflected his experiences in Paris during the spring of 1928. Premiered by Walter Damrosch and the newly formed New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society

on December 13, 1928, *An American in Paris* is regarded as the composer's most successful purely symphonic effort.

Calling his work a "rhapsodic ballet," Gershwin explained: "My purpose here is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about the city, and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere.... The opening gay section is followed by a rich blues with a strong rhythmic undercurrent. Our American friend perhaps after strolling into a cafe and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness. The harmony here is both more intense and simple than in the preceding pages. This blues rises to a climax followed by a coda in which the spirit of the music returns to the vivacity and bubbling exuberance of the opening part with its impressions of Paris. Apparently the homesick American, having left the cafe and reached the open air has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant."