

Copland's most popular music was composed for ballet. Billy the Kid was the first to draw on American folk tunes, then Appalachian Spring and Rodeo.

Most ballets are born in the minds of the choreographer, not in the minds of a composer. And it's a choreographer who then goes and tries to find a composer who wants to put that particular choreographic idea into music. Rodeo was born in the mind of Agnes DeMille.

There was no big epic premises. There were no overtones of world importance or anything. Just people living their lives out west. And so I tell him the story-- Aaron. Just didn't say a word. And he's glasses went opaque. And I said, well, it isn't Hamlet. And with that, there was a raucous laugh. Just a yelp, and I threw a sofa pillow at his head, and I think I didn't miss. And then we were friends.

This is rare footage of that first 1942 production of "Rodeo."

["RODEO," MUSIC PLAYING]

The ballet means extremely much. And the way I felt about him, the way I felt about America, really. And the whole war effort, at that moment, and the fact that we were fighting for our lives, and that all our young men were going out to do or die, really they're putting their lives on the line. All of that was in my work, whether I meant it to be or not, it's there. And it's, to me, the actual world of this country. I think Aaron got a great deal of that in the music.

[RODEO PLAYING]

These film excerpts provide the first opportunity to see the only existing record of Agnes DeMille dancing in "Rodeo."

["RODEO," MUSIC PLAYING]

They paid me \$15, so at least they didn't feel that they were losing money on me. I got 22 curtain calls. It was the Metropolitan Opera House. Aaron and I held hands and stood on the stage. I must say it was unforgettable, for us, certainly. And very few opening nights have been like that.

["RODEO," MUSIC PLAYING]

I remember that Martha Graham made an appointment with me and told me she'd love to have me write a ballet score for her. And then she outlined the ballet, what was going to happen in it, the nature of it. But it had no title. I went to Mexico that summer, and I worked on the ballet. I kept sending her back parts of it. And finally, I came back and stopped off in Washington where the ballet was in rehearsal. And the first thing I said to her was, Martha, what did you call the ballet? She said, "Appalachian Spring." I said, what a nice name. Where did you get it? She said, well it's the name of a poem by Hart Crane.

I said, well does the poem have anything to do with your ballet? She said, no. I just like the title, and I used it. But, I can't tell you how many times people have spoke to me after a performance of "Appalachian Spring" and said to me, you know, when I hear your music, I can just see the Appalachians and feel spring.

Martha Graham, in a 1965 film of her ballet.

["APPALACHIAN SPRING," MUSIC PLAYING]

Transcript of Aaron Copland: A Self-Portrait. <http://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=100725&xtid=989>