



# COPLAND *RODEO* & MAJESTIC ELGAR

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MAY 5 & 6, AT 8 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

LEONARD SLATKIN, *conductor*

### AARON COPLAND

**24 minutes**

#### **Rodeo for orchestra (Ballet in One Act)**

Buckaroo Holiday  
Corral Nocturne  
Ranch House Party  
Saturday Night Waltz  
Hoe-Down

### LEONARD SLATKIN

**14 minutes**

#### ***Kinah***

### ***INTERMISSION***

**20 minutes**

### EDWARD ELGAR

**40 minutes**

#### **Symphony No. 1 in A-flat major, op. 55**

I. Andante; nobilmente e semplice - Allegro  
II. Allegro molto  
III. Adagio  
IV. Lento - Allegro

*This concert will last approximately one hour, 50 minutes,  
including a 20-minute intermission.*

# AARON COPLAND

## Rodeo for orchestra (Ballet in One Act)

Born on November 14, 1900,  
in Brooklyn, New York

Died on December 2, 1990,  
in North Tarrytown, New York

**Composed:**  
1942

**Estimated  
length:**  
24 minutes



**First performance:**

October 16, 1942, at the  
Metropolitan Opera House.

**First Nashville Symphony  
performance:**

These are the first performances  
that the Nashville Symphony will  
perform the entire work.

The art of dance played a significant role in Aaron Copland's development of his signature voice. The biographer Howard Pollack notes that Copland's recollections of coming of age in Brooklyn as the son of Jewish immigrants from Russia often involved "the dance music at traditional Jewish weddings and the singing of Hebrew chant, both of which impressed him."

After living in Paris and experimenting with Modernist trends as well as hybrids of symphonic music and jazz, Copland gravitated toward a style marked by outward simplicity and directness in the 1930s and 1940s. He honed this more populist approach to music in the iconic trio of ballet scores including *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944).

One pragmatic basis for the development of this sound has to do with the contexts for which Copland was writing—often collaborative projects in ballet, theater, and film that involved specifically American subject matter. *Billy the Kid* represents a major breakthrough in this regard. It caught the attention of the dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille (1905-1993), niece of the motion-picture director. Working with the Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo—an offshoot of Sergei Diaghilev's legendary Ballets Russes that spent the war years touring in the United States—she persuaded the company to commission a new work based on the folklore of the American West.

Copland had at first resisted coming on board the *Billy the Kid* project, objecting that as a Brooklyn-bred artist he was uncertain of his "capabilities as

a 'cowboy composer.'" Though *Billy* turned out to be a success, he wasn't eager to continue in that vein but found the scenario devised by de Mille sufficiently distinctive when she insisted on his participation.

De Mille facetiously described *Rodeo* (initially titled *The Courting at Burnt Ranch*) as "*The Taming of the Shrew*—cowboy style." Set around 1900 on a ranch in the Southwest, the ballet revolves around the misfit Cowgirl (danced by de Mille) and her attempts to win the affections of the Head Wrangler, who is preoccupied with the Rancher's Daughter. After coming to terms with her solitude, the Cowgirl finds love with another cowboy, Champion Roper. The triumphant premiere at the old Metropolitan Opera House in October 1942 remains a landmark in American ballet history.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The complete ballet includes five sections. Copland excised one of these ("Ranch House Party") as well as some of the scene change music to create the orchestral suite *Four Dance Episodes*. To evoke the old West, he relied much more than in the preceding *Billy the Kid* on pre-existing folk tunes, which he found in several collections of traditional American music.

"Buckaroo Holiday" introduces the main characters, with themes identified with the Cowgirl, the cowboys as a group, and the horse-trotting "Rodeo" theme. In "Corral Nocturne," Copland

paints an especially evocative atmosphere with woodwinds to represent the Cowgirl's sense of the vast Western stillness. Following the "Ranch House Party" and its honky-tonk energy, "Saturday Night Waltz" incorporates the ritual of fiddles tuning for this dance-within-the-dance. The concluding "Hoe-Down," *Rodeo*'s most famous segment,

develops several traditional fiddlers' tunes with irresistible vivacity.

*Scored for 3 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes and English horn, 2 clarinets and bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta, and strings*

## LEONARD SLATKIN

### *Kinah*

Born on September 1, 1944,  
in Los Angeles, California

Currently resides  
in St. Louis, Missouri

**Composed:**  
2015

**Estimated  
length:**  
14 minutes



**First performance:**

December 2015 with the  
composer conducting the  
Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

**First Nashville Symphony  
performance:**

These are the Nashville  
Symphony's first performances  
of this work.

**A**mong the most lauded conductors of our era, Leonard Slatkin has a special connection with the Nashville Symphony and its history. As the orchestra's music advisor, he did the honors of conducting the historic inaugural concert that opened Schermerhorn Symphony Center on September 9, 2006. And it was under Slatkin's baton that the Nashville Symphony won a GRAMMY® Award trifecta with its 2007 release of music by Joan Tower (Best Classical Album, Best Orchestral Performance, and Best Classical Contemporary Composition).

Like Copland, Slatkin grew up in a Jewish family that had emigrated from Russia—though, in his case, it was his grandparents' generation who had made their way to America. Both of his parents became acclaimed professional musicians: the violinist (and conductor) Felix Slatkin and the cellist Eleanor Aller, who met and got married while working for the film industry in the golden age of Hollywood. Both held prominent positions in the studio orchestras and played the solos heard by countless moviegoers. They also founded the influential and GRAMMY® Award-winning

Hollywood String Quartet, which was active from 1939 to 1961.

Somehow, amid his intensely active international career as a conductor, Slatkin has found time to author books and compose such works as *The Raven* (his take on the poem by Edgar Allan Poe, premiered in 1971 by Vincent Prince), a double concerto for his mother and his brother Frederick (also a cellist), and, most recently, an artful series of transcriptions titled *Brahmsiana*.

*Kinah*, which also has a Brahms connection, was inspired by a desire to pay tribute to the legacy of Slatkin's parents. On February 6, 1963, Felix and Eleanor Slatkin rehearsed the Double Concerto of Brahms for a performance in Los Angeles. It was their last time playing together: Felix died suddenly of a heart attack two days later. The 19-year-old Leonard attended the rehearsal, where he recalls sensing that "everyone there was mesmerized by the pair's incredible way with this piece. We all knew that the concert would be an evening to treasure."

*Kinah* is the Hebrew word for elegy or lament. "Although we were not a devout family, there was always something of our Jewish heritage felt in

the Slatkin household,” notes the composer. The unusual ensemble comprises horns, strings, metal percussion, harps, celeste, and piano. Off-stage instruments also play an important role: we hear a flugelhorn and trumpet and—as stand-ins for Felix and Eleanor—a solo violin and cello.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

*Kinah* is built from two ways of looking at the touching opening melody from the Andante of Brahms’s Double Concerto (composed in 1887). We hear it vertically, compressed into a chord (heard at the beginning) and in its normal horizontal form, first played by the off-stage flugelhorn and then taken up gradually by the other instruments.

Slatkin varies the texture as the elegy continues, until, at the conclusion, the music calms to prepare the way for the distant sound of the off-stage violin and cello “rehearsing” passages from the Brahms Andante.

“They do not complete their phrases,” writes Slatkin, “a reminder that the public never heard my parents’ interpretation of the piece. The last utterance of the two soloists utilizes the final bars of the Andante, with a brief silence occurring just before a dark bell-like sound in the orchestra brings the work to an end.”

*Scored for 4 horns, 4 percussionists and strings, plus off-stage flugelhorn/trumpet and off-stage solo violin, and cello*

# EDWARD ELGAR

## Symphony No. 1 in A-flat major, Op. 55

Born on June 2, 1857, in the village of Lower Broadheath in the Midlands of England

Died on February 23, 1934, in Worcester, England

**Composed:**  
1907-08

**Estimated length:**  
52 minutes



**First performance:**

December 3, 1908, with Hans Richter conducting the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, England

**First Nashville Symphony**

**performance:** November 22, 1985 with Kenneth Schermerhorn conducting at Andrew Jackson Hall at TPAC.

Edward Elgar was simultaneously an insider and an outsider—a situation that generated tremendous creative tension. He received numerous official distinctions and honorary degrees from prestigious universities. Queen Victoria made him a knight in 1904, and his best-known piece, the first in the series of *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, became the signature tune of British imperial power.

Elgar grew up in a shopkeeper’s family in the cathedral city of Worcester, northwest of the capital. The son of a piano tuner who ran a music shop in this hyper-class-conscious society, Elgar taught himself composition. The family was unable

to afford tuition to study at a conservatory on the continent, though he later went on to receive honorary degrees.

Elgar was also Roman Catholic. In the context of the British Empire at the time, this further set the already self-conscious composer apart. Although he married the highly accomplished Caroline Alice Roberts, the Protestant daughter of a prominent major general, her family did not approve of the match. She became a tireless supporter of the composer, not only emotionally but as his business manager.

This tension between outward success and feelings of social alienation has a parallel in Elgar’s

changing reputation. He toiled patiently for decades before achieving his international breakthrough with the *Enigma Variations* in 1899. The First Symphony, which premiered nearly a decade later, further secured Elgar's high standing.

The challenge of producing his first work in the lofty symphonic tradition was daunting. Elgar announced plans for a symphony as early as 1898—taking an imperial British general as inspiration—but abandoned that project when he realized that he needed more time to let his ideas mature. Perhaps it was the milestone of reaching the age of 50 (in 1907) that finally compelled Elgar to refocus his energy.

After conceiving the noble theme that opens the First Symphony, Elgar began shaping the piece during a stay in Rome later in 1907—he had gotten into the habit of wintering in Italy with his wife owing to health problems—and continued working on it back at his home in the cathedral town of Hereford in the West Midlands. Later, Elgar explained that he had abandoned the idea of an extra-musical program “beyond a wide experience of human life with a great charity (love) and a massive hope in the future.”

Elgar dedicated his Symphony No. 1 to the German musician Hans Richter, an ardent Elgar champion who had conducted the world's first complete presentation of Richard Wagner's *Ring* cycle in 1876. Wagner is one of several discernible influences in this score (along with Beethoven and Wagner's rival, Brahms). The stakes were particularly high for the world premiere in Manchester, which took place in December 1908. Elgar's First, declared by Richter to be “the greatest symphony of modern times,” was an immediate sensation, racking up nearly 100 performances around the world over the next year alone.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Elgar's design follows the convention of four movements, and his post-Romantic, warmly expressive language has immediate appeal. Yet within with these fundamentally conservative outlines, he introduces boldly destabilizing procedures that heighten the sense of drama and emotional conflict.

The composer noted that the grand opening theme or motto, which is stated after quietly rolling thunder on the timpani, is “intended to be simple &, in intention, noble & elevating ... the sort of ideal call—in the sense of persuasion, not coercion or command—& something above everyday & sordid things.” Echoing the spacious, timeless effect of music from Wagner's final opera, *Parsifal*, the theme at first seems self-contained, perfect in itself. Yet it opens the door to an epic journey.

An abrupt change of tempo and key jolts the music into the first movement proper. The dichotomy between the opening and this faster music has been interpreted as a musical reflection of Elgar's inherent contradictions. The lengthy first movement reaches a quiet, crepuscular conclusion, returning to the key of the beginning (A-flat major).

The second movement combines aspects of a scherzo with a march—almost in the manner of Mahler. A calmer, pastoral mood contrasts with restless energy framing the movement. The second and third movements are linked without pause, and the radiant melody that begins the Adagio is a variant of the scherzo theme—dramatically decelerated and phrased as a single breath. Richter likened this slow movement to the spirit of Beethoven's great adagios. At the world premiere, the audience applauded it so enthusiastically that Elgar was compelled at this point in the performance to acknowledge the reaction with an onstage bow.

The final movement starts with slow, almost ghostlike music in D minor that emits shadowy recollections of the first movement. The pace speeds up, as it did after the passage opening the first movement. Elgar creates a sense of dramatic anticipation through his transformation of thematic materials that for many listeners evokes the style of Brahms. The grand theme from the opening of the First returns in the final pages—all the nobler in aspect—to conclude a symphony Elgar described as revealing “a composer's outlook on life.”

*Scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes and English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps, and strings*

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony's program annotator.