



AMERICAN CLASSICS



COPLAND: The Tender Land Suite

CRESTON: Saxophone Concerto

KAY: Pietà • PISTON: The Incredible Flutist Suite

Anna Mattix, English Horn

Timothy McAllister, Alto Saxophone

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic

JoAnn Falletta

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)	
The Tender Land Suite (1958)	18:38
❶ I. Introduction and Love Music	8:09
❷ II. Party Scene –	4:48
❸ III. Finale: The Promise of Living	5:36
Paul Creston (1906–1985)	
Saxophone Concerto, Op. 26 (1941)	18:52
❹ I. Energetic	5:59
❺ II. Meditative	7:25
❻ III. Rhythmic	5:23
Ulysses Kay (1917–1995)	
❼ Pietà (1950)	8:40
Walter Piston (1894–1976)	
The Incredible Flutist Suite (1940)	16:10
❽ I. Introduction: Siesta in the Market Place –	0:58
❾ II. Entrance of the Vendors –	2:20
❿ III. Entrance of the Customers –	0:34
⓫ IV. Tango of the Merchant’s Daughters –	3:01
⓬ V. Arrival of the Circus –	0:33
⓭ VI. Circus March –	0:37
⓮ VII. The Flutist –	1:48
⓯ VIII. Minuet –	0:40
⓰ IX. Spanish Waltz –	1:18
⓱ X. Siciliana –	2:15
⓲ XI. Polka Finale	2:05

Recorded: 16–18 June 2022 at the Elsie & Marvin Dekelboum Concert Hall,
The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, College Park, Maryland, USA
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Aaron Copland (1900–1990) • Paul Creston (1906–1985) • Ulysses Kay (1917–1995)

Walter Piston (1894–1976): Orchestral Works

Now that we are well into the third decade of the 21st century, is it possible to look back at music composed in America during the 20th with a fresh perspective? Can we approach it without all the sometimes discordant “isms” (serialism, neo-Classicism, neo-Romanticism, sonorism, minimalism, etc.) that divided audiences and left heaps of wonderful music unnoticed or underappreciated? It appears so, as many composers and works that failed to find traction with critics, academia, record companies and radio networks during those turbulent days are finding new audiences in the concert hall and on recordings.

Aaron Copland (1900–1990): The Tender Land Suite (1958)

Aaron Copland, of course, strode the 20th century of American music like a colossus. His works (especially those in his more populist “Americana” style) were performed everywhere, broadcast and recorded with regularity. His was almost a household name, with some of his music becoming part of American popular culture. He wrote for almost all genres and his influence was far-reaching. He had the respect of both audiences and – for the most part – critics. His writing for both solo and choral voices was expert and sensitive. Yet, when he made his sole attempt at a full-length opera, the result was decidedly mixed.

Broadway legends Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II brought Copland a commission for a stage work to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the League of American Composers in 1953. The libretto by Erik Johns (a dancer, painter and poet then living with Copland and serving as his secretary), writing under the pseudonym “Horace Everett,” is about a farm family in the 1930s. The eldest daughter, Laurie, is about to graduate from high school, and when two drifters come along looking for jobs, she falls in love with one of them. He returns her feelings, but, in the composer’s words, “there is something of a complication. She associates him with freedom, and he associates her with settling down.” The musical language is that of Copland’s popular ballets and film scores.

The Tender Land was originally intended for the NBC Television Opera Theatre, which had experienced great success with Gian Carlo Menotti’s *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in 1951. But when the network rejected the idea, the New York City Opera took it up and scheduled the premiere for early April 1954. Obligations at Tanglewood the previous summer and a visit to Mexico delayed work on the project, however, and Copland was still composing in mid-March; orchestration was not completed until a few days before the opening. The premiere was not a success, lasting for only two performances. Based in part on advice from Menotti, Copland revised the work twice – for Tanglewood performances later that year and again in 1955. He then devised a suite from the opera, which was premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Fritz Reiner in April 1958. Copland himself conducted the first recording, made with the Boston Symphony Orchestra the following year.

Unlike opera suites that mainly consist of instrumental excerpts (overtures, marches, entr’actes, dances, etc.), Copland’s suite from *The Tender Land* is a carefully worked-out, independent composition that restructures, re-orchestrates and, to some small extent, even re-composes important passages from the opera. It begins with the dramatic music that opens Act III, which then segues into the love duet from Act I. Copland contrasts a line rife with syncopated figures (reflecting the impetuous, ardent young lovers) with a more confident idea in longer note values. Two stands of violins intone the final statement of the syncopated idea to the words, “I love you, I love you, I do.”

The second movement is a patchwork of dance music from Act II, culminating in an instrumental arrangement of the big choral number (well known as an independent choral selection): “Stomp your foot upon the ground. Throw the windows open. Take a breath of fresh June air and dance around the room, and dance around the room.” It segues without a break to the final movement, derived from the quartet that ends Act I. In it, Copland combines the traditional American tune *Zion’s Walls* (which he had already set for solo voice as part of his collection of *Old American Songs*) with an original tune conveying this optimistic message: “The promise of living with hope and thanksgiving is born of our loving our friends and our labor.” It is noteworthy that Copland was able to capture the indomitable American spirit in such an uplifting anthem, especially after the recent political trauma caused by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his House Committee on Un-American Activities. Copland’s friend and mentee, Leonard Bernstein, accomplished something similar in *Make Our Garden Grow*, the concluding chorus of his equally ill-fated *Candide*, which opened on Broadway in December 1956, over two-and-a-half years later.

Paul Creston (1906–1985): Saxophone Concerto, Op. 26 (1941)

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, saxophonist Cecil Leeson began to introduce American audiences to the notion that his instrument had a place beyond the world of jazz and big bands. As a writer in *The Hollywood News* observed, “In Leeson’s capable hands, the saxophone [is] no longer the blatant jazz instrument of popular conception, but an instrument of really beautiful tone color.” Composer Paul Creston, who occasionally accompanied Leeson, agreed, and after writing both a sonata and a suite for the two of them to play together during the 1930s, accepted a commission to compose a concerto with Leeson

as dedicatee in 1941. In his own words, he wanted to “demonstrate the capabilities of the E flat alto saxophone as a solo instrument.” The work drew special attention when it was given its broadcast premiere by the New York Philharmonic (then the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York), conducted by Artur Rodzinski, on 13 February 1944. Vincent J. Abato was the soloist.

The first movement, in sonata form, begins with a dramatic presentation of the first theme in the strings, punctuated by *tutti* chords and twice interrupted by rapid saxophone figures. The theme takes on a more lyrical character for its formal presentation by the orchestra, while the soloist plays an embellished version of it. The second theme is more playful and rhythmic, with offbeat accents in the accompaniment. Creston begins the development with a return to the opening idea, and signals the coming coda by moving the first theme to the bass and presenting it in augmentation.

The meditative second movement derives much of its thematic material from the accompanying figure of the first. Lightly scored, it is in quintuple meter – although the composer avoids any sense of downbeats as the lines weave in and out of duplet and triplet figures. Surprisingly, the concerto’s cadenza appears unexpectedly in the middle of this movement (“logically though unexpectedly,” said Creston), followed by a return to the main theme – but this time played on oboe rather than saxophone. The final movement is a modified rondo form. As the composer wrote in a program note for the New York Philharmonic performance, it is “somewhat march-like in tempo and *scherzo*-like in feeling. As the second movement glorifies the tone of the saxophone, this movement stresses the staccato (tonguing) and dramatic capabilities of the instrument.” Here the emphasis is on rhythm “in all its phases.” The piece remains popular with soloists today but is more often performed in the arrangement for concert band made by the composer in 1963.

The Tender Land, production shot, 1954

Photo: Library of Congress/Gus Manos



Ulysses Kay (1917–1995): *Pietà* (1950)

In 1949, Ulysses Kay became the first black composer to win the coveted Prix de Rome (which he won again in 1951). It was during his first stay in the Eternal City that he composed his *Pietà* for English horn and string orchestra, perhaps inspired by the famous eponymous sculpture by Michelangelo, now enshrined within St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. (Conductor JoAnn Falletta describes the piece as "Kay's personal reflection on Michelangelo's masterpiece.") Kay dedicated the piece to the Italian oboist Pietro Accaroni, who had premiered his *Suite in B for Oboe and Piano* in 1949.

Pietà is a freely structured cantilena without obvious form, although there is a recurring motif – three repeated notes followed by a rising second (either minor or major) – that weaves its way subtly through the piece. Kay obviates any sense of clear rhythm by avoiding heavily accented downbeats and by shifting between duple and triple divisions of the same basic pulse, sometimes with one in the solo line and the other in the accompaniment.

Although Michelangelo's masterpiece depicts the grief of Mary as she cradles the body of the crucified Christ, the word *pietà* in Italian also has a more general meaning of mercy or compassion. Kay's piece seems to assert no obvious religious connotations, so it is perhaps in that broader sense that the work might be interpreted. Soloist Anna Mattix discovered the piece while conducting research in her role as a teaching artist for the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Since it has received virtually no professional performances since the 1950s, she happily reintroduced it to audiences during the uncertain days of the Covid-19 pandemic. She says she was struck by the title and describes the work as "an expression of love for one another as we move forward in our uncertain world." Conductor Falletta concurs: "When Anna brought the piece to me, I thought it was extraordinary, so I said we've got to play this."

Walter Piston (1894–1976): *The Incredible Flutist Suite* (1940)

Since his death in 1976, Walter Piston's reputation has rested largely on his eight symphonies. According to musicologist Walter Simmons, his "earlier essays in the genre are personable, meticulously wrought representatives of their time and place, and [his] later contributions probe depths of abstract expression with a majestic dignity that transcends national limitations." Virtually an institution at Harvard University, where he taught from 1926 until his retirement in 1960, Piston's four textbooks on music theory are considered classics. His list of successful students reads like a biographical dictionary of 20th-century American music, including such diverse composers as Leonard Bernstein, Leroy Anderson and Elliot Carter. But while some of his music has been unjustly accused of suffering from more than a whiff of academia, he composed one colorfully theatrical work early in his career that was an instant hit and has remained popular with orchestras and audiences ever since.

Arthur Fiedler commissioned Piston to compose a ballet for the Boston Pops Orchestra in 1938. Set to a scenario written by Piston and Hans Wiener (choreographer and principal dancer who later went by the name Jan Veen), it premiered in Boston on 30 May 1938. The composer immediately fashioned a suite from the ballet (what he deemed "all the best bits"), which was recorded by Fiedler and the Boston Pops barely a month later, and received its first public performance in November 1940 with Fritz Reiner leading the Pittsburgh Symphony. It has held a place in the repertoire of American orchestras ever since. The suite includes approximately half of the music of the full ballet and follows the same sequence as the theatrical action.

The opening music depicts a sleepy afternoon in a village square. Tremolando strings and languorous woodwinds set the scene, which is suddenly interrupted by more playful strains as vendors arrive to set up shop and the marketplace becomes a beehive of activity. The opening music reprises just before horns and solo trumpet announce the arrival of the customers. The first of several character dances follows: the *Tango of the Merchant's Daughters* features an irresistible melody in quintuple meter made even more interesting by switching the prevailing three–two pattern to two–three at the cadences. A Hispanic-flavored midsection provides contrast before the beguiling melody returns to form a perfect A–B–A structure.

Horns and trumpet return to announce a new arrival: the circus is in town! Piston's *Circus March* displays the excitement of the populace by adding the sound of a cheering mob – generated by all the members of the orchestra who are not otherwise playing – and capped by one final theatrical touch: the sound of a barking dog. (Piston's score calls for two barks; the present recording includes those plus punctuation from a *basso profundo* breed.) More circus-related dances follow in the full ballet (including monkeys and jugglers), but the suite jumps right to the star of the show: the incredible flutist himself, who is in fact a charmer – both of snakes and of women. His seductive solo is aimed not only at the snake in his basket but also at one of the merchant's daughters, with whom he makes a date for later that evening. More character dances follow: a minuet for an old widow and the merchant and a lively, castanet-driven Spanish waltz (called *Dance of Sons and Daughters* in the ballet). As eight o'clock strikes on horn and piano, the flutist and merchant's daughter begin to dance to an elegant *Siciliana*. They are soon joined by all the other young people in a lively polka that brings the ballet (and suite) to a festive conclusion.

Walter Piston, Arthur Fiedler, Hans Wiener (choreographer and principal dancer),
and Marco Montedoro (designer) after a rehearsal of *The Incredible Flutist*, May 1938

Photo: John B. Sanromá Photograph Collection, Boston Public Library



Anna Mattix



Oboist and English hornist Anna Mattix has been a member of the Buffalo Philharmonic (BPO) since 2007. In addition to her work with the BPO, Mattix performs locally with the Buffalo Chamber Players, the ARS NOVA musicians and teaches at Buffalo State College and Canisius College. Solo recording credits include *The Swan of Tuonela* by Sibelius and *Vox Humana* by Rob Deemer, a work dedicated to her – both of which were released on the Beau Fleuve label. Mattix is also a passionate educator and advocate for community engagement and is a member of the BPO's Education Committee. She is a featured Teaching Artist for BPO and has created a diverse selection of programs for schools, libraries and community centers.

Timothy McAllister



Critically acclaimed saxophonist Timothy McAllister is one of today's premier wind soloists, a member of the GRAMMY Award-winning Prism Quartet, and a champion of contemporary music credited with over 50 recordings and 200 premieres of new compositions by eminent and emerging composers worldwide. He has appeared with most of the world's top orchestras across 20 countries. His recording of Kenneth Fuchs's *Rush (Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Orchestra)* with JoAnn Falletta and the London Symphony Orchestra appears on the 2019 GRAMMY Award-winning album *Spiritualist* (Naxos 8.559824). Additionally, he serves as professor of saxophone at the University of Michigan.

www.timothymcallister.com

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic



The National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic is one of the most celebrated festival orchestras in the United States. Having received a GRAMMY Award nomination for Best Orchestral Performance in 2019 for their album of works by Ruggles, Stucky, and Harbison (Naxos 8.559836), its alumni occupy important positions in virtually every major symphony orchestra in the US. Held annually since 1988 at the University of Maryland, the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic is a leader in orchestral training and creative programming, championing works by underrepresented composers alongside standards of the repertoire.

www.noi.umd.edu

JoAnn Falletta



Photo: Heather Bellini

Multiple GRAMMY-winning conductor JoAnn Falletta serves as music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO) and music director laureate of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. She has guest conducted many of the most prominent orchestras in America, Canada, Europe, Asia and South America. As music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American ensemble. She has a discography of over 125 titles, and is a leading recording artist for Naxos. Her GRAMMY-winning Naxos recordings include Richard Danielpour's *The Passion of Yeshua* (8.559885-86) and John Corigliano's *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* (8.559331), both with the BPO, and Kenneth Fuchs' *Spiritualist* with the London Symphony Orchestra (8.559824). Falletta is a member of the esteemed American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has served as a member of the National Council on the Arts, is the recipient of many of the most prestigious conducting awards and was named *Performance Today's* Classical Woman of the Year 2019 and one of the 50 great conductors of all time by *Gramophone* magazine.

www.joannfalletta.com

Aaron
COPLAND
(1900–1990)

1–3 The Tender Land Suite (1958) 18:38

Paul
CRESTON
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4–6 Saxophone Concerto, Op. 26 (1941)* 18:52

Ulysses
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7 Pietà (1950)* 8:40

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8–18 The Incredible Flutist Suite (1940) 16:10

*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Anna Mattix, English Horn 7

Timothy McAllister, Alto Saxophone 4–6

**National Orchestral
Institute Philharmonic**

JoAnn Falletta

A detailed track list and full recording and publishing information can be found inside the booklet

Booklet notes: Frank K. DeWald

Special thanks to Charles Lilley

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

This recording brings together four extraordinary mid-20th-century composers who helped shape America's musical destiny. Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* is a moving tribute to the American rancher and farmer. It forms a profound celebration of those unsung heroes of that country's landscape, and is perhaps his greatest expression of the preciousness of life. Walter Piston is represented by his colorful and beguiling *The Incredible Flutist*, which depicts a traveling circus led by a magical musician who is able to heal the sorrows of those who hear his music. The two premiere recordings here are the original orchestral version of Paul Creston's thrilling *Saxophone Concerto*, and Ulysses Kay's *Pietà* – a beautiful elegy inspired by Michelangelo's masterpiece.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
62:32