

Aaron Copland Letter from Home

Submitted by Jim Waddelow

Letter from Home was commissioned in 1944 by Paul Whiteman and the American Broadcasting Company. Whiteman reached out to several prominent composers to create patriotic works to be performed for the benefit of American troops serving overseas in World War II, and Copland eagerly accepted. Whiteman conducted the premiere with his dance band on a live radio broadcast of the Philco Radio Hour on October 17, 1944. Copland later went on to revise the orchestration of the work in what was to become the 1962 version that is now commonly played. It consists of 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones. A large percussion section of timpani, cymbals, bass drum, orchestral bells, and triangle is countered with the traditional string sections. There are also optional parts for a harp and a piano. When describing the mood of the short six minute work, the composer placed the perspective from that of the soldier saying "It's very sentimental, but not meant to be taken too literally. I meant only to convey the emotion that might be naturally awakened in the recipient by receiving a letter from home." *Letter from Home* is similar in style to the more well-known ballets of the composer's war era compositions like *Appalachian Spring* and *The Red Pony*. From the opening clarinet solo, the first half of the piece is a transparent series of traded solos and duets within the woodwinds and a solo trumpet. Momentum picks up in both tempo and orchestration as the unison tutti section at the half-way point becomes the emotional centerpiece before Copland slows things down as he did at the beginning. The traded solos of the exposition return over a somber string section.

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