

Notes on the Program
By Aaron Grad

***Silicon Hymnal* [2025]**

MASON BATES

Born January 23, 1977 in Richmond, Virginia

*From his orchestral scores featuring samples triggered by laptop to his Grammy-winning opera about Steve Jobs, Mason Bates has redefined the intersection of concert music and technology. He wrote the following program note about *Silicon Hymnal*, a triple concerto co-commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra for Time for Three.*

Silicon Hymnal is a book of songs with a heart of electronica. Created for the uniquely gifted Time for Three, whose members can play (and sing) in any style, this triple concerto unfolds in progressively more expansive movements. *Hypnotica* mixes meditative textures between soloists, orchestra, and electronica, drifting in and out of focus in a dreamlike manner. The ensuing *Phat Reel* combines a heavy beat (‘phat’ in hip-hop parlance) with a reimagined fiddle ‘reel’—a jaunty folk tune of Scottish origins—in a lopsided dance that swaps violin for mandolin. *Air for Three* floats a double bass melody over airy violin textures and jazz harmonies. The work takes a deep dive in *Abide with Me*, an atmospheric recasting of the nineteenth-century hymn known for its plaintive calls for guidance amidst the darkness of “eventide.” At the most vulnerable moment in the movement, the soloists are called to sing the hymn itself. All thematic elements return in the barnburner finale, making boisterous cameos over an engine of perpetual motion. Analogue and digital figuration swirl together in an exuberant close.

-Mason Bates

***Appalachian Spring* [1944]**

AARON COPLAND

Born November 14, 1900 in Brooklyn, New York

Died December 2, 1990 in North Tarrytown, New York

The son of Jewish immigrants from Lithuania, Aaron Copland was born in 1900 in Brooklyn. Like so many eager American artists, he spent time in the 1920s in Paris, where lessons with Nadia Boulanger helped him hone in on his true voice. In the 1930s, visits to Mexico and a pair of ballet scores meant to evoke cowboy culture in the Southwest helped this neurotic city slicker tap into a spacious ethos of simple intervals and pure harmonies.

Aaron Copland began his crowning work of Americana, *Appalachian Spring*, in 1943. He created the ballet for the dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, and he worked under

the title *Ballet for Martha* until not long before the premiere, when Graham suggested *Appalachian Spring*, borrowing a phrase from Hart Crane's poem "The Bridge."

Created for the 500-seat auditorium at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, this ballet needed a compact pit orchestra, so Copland used just thirteen instruments in the original version. The next year he arranged most of the ballet into a concert suite for full orchestra. The score went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1945, cementing Copland's status as the leading composer of his generation.

The wonder of *Appalachian Spring* is how it achieves so much using such simple and familiar musical ingredients. The first section assembles its hazy wash of consonant sonorities by enunciating plain triads and the resonant intervals of fourths and fifths. The following section energizes similarly basic materials—octave leaps, triadic intervals and descending major scales—into spry dance music. There is a tender scene for the young couple, a lively romp depicting the revivalist and his dancing minions, and then a brisk solo dance for the bride, which dissipates into a return of the gentle, triadic wash of the beginning.

The famous section that follows, starting with a theme in the clarinet, presents the tune of *Simple Gifts*, a Shaker dance song written in 1848 by Joseph Brackett. The humble melody fits seamlessly into the homespun language of Copland's score, and the increasingly grand variations rise to a transcendental climax.

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