



From the Top at Carnegie Hall
Episode 13: "Interlochen Arts Academy Chamber Orchestra"
Airing on PBS (check local TV listings)
Available online at pbs.org

Learning Activity

Title: *Appalachian Spring*

Description: Students will explore the connection between music and movement through choreographing aspects of their everyday activities.

Grade Level: 6-8 (may be adapted for different levels)

National Music Standards: **6** Listening to, analyzing and describing music, **8** Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts, **9** Understanding music in relation to history and culture

National Dance Standard: **3** Understanding dance as a way to create and communicate meaning

Background

The ballet *Appalachian Spring* sprang from a collaboration between composer Aaron Copland and choreographer and dancer Martha Graham. Both American artists were innovators: Copland developed a new musical language to illustrate the American experience while Graham has been described as the "mother of modern dance." Graham requested an "American ballet" from Copland, and, with a rough outline in hand from Graham, he composed what he simply called "Ballet for Martha."



The Interlochen Arts Academy Chamber Orchestra at Carnegie Hall

The dance tells the story of a newlywed couple in the western Pennsylvania frontier in the early 1800s. The section performed by the Interlochen Arts Academy Chamber Orchestra on this

episode of *From the Top at Carnegie Hall* is based on the Shaker hymn "Simple Gifts." This portion of the ballet shows the newly married couple as they go through their daily tasks.

Materials: Computer with media player; projector and speakers if needed; the DVD *Martha Graham: Dance on Film* from The Criterion Collection (available new and used on Amazon.com, or check your local public or university library)

Activity Description

- 1) **Explain** to students that they will be watching a musical performance of "Simple Gifts" from the Aaron Copland ballet *Appalachian Spring*. The ballet takes place in the early 1800s on the western Pennsylvania frontier. The segment they will be watching depicts the daily life of a newlywed frontier couple. What kinds of things do they think that a couple would be doing in that time and place? Make a list of these on the board.
- 2) **Watch** the Interlochen Arts Academy Chamber Orchestra's performance of "Simple Gifts" on episode 13. **Discuss what images and ideas** come to mind. What are some everyday activities or scenarios that this music suggests? How would the students choreograph to the music? What story/emotion/idea would they want to express?
- 3) From the DVD of *Martha Graham: Dance on Film*, **watch** the segment "Simple Gifts" from *Appalachian Spring*. **Ask** students to pay attention to the way Graham illustrated daily activities through dance and how those movements connect to the music. **Discuss** what they noticed about the choreography.
- 4) In small groups have students **brainstorm movements** that are part of their everyday experience (for example: putting away clothes, looking both ways before crossing a street, greeting a friend).
- 5) In the same small groups or in pairs **have students pick a movement to choreograph, and a piece of music to use with it**. Have them **create their own "daily activities dance"** to the music of their choice, which they can then perform for the class.

Find out more!

About the composer and how he worked

The Library of Congress' Aaron Copland Collection has an extensive set of digitized materials (letters, rough sketches, scores, etc.) relating to *Appalachian Spring*, including the composer's correspondence with the Library of Congress and various conductors.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/copland/acworks.html#work0030>

You can also read about his life and work and see a multimedia presentation at:

<http://www.keepingscore.org/flash/copland/index.html>

About the music

Hear an audio discussion of *Appalachian Spring* from NPR's Performance Today series, Milestones of the Millennium, at:

<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/milestones/991027.motm.apspring.html>

About the ballet

For an advanced lesson plan for grades 9-12 focused on the ballet, visit the Kennedy Center web site:

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/3781/>

Additionally, PBS's Great Performances series has more than a dozen segments on dance at:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/qperf/genre/dance.html>



Martha Graham and Erick Hawkins in the premiere of *Appalachian Spring*, October 30, 1944
Courtesy Library of Congress collections

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