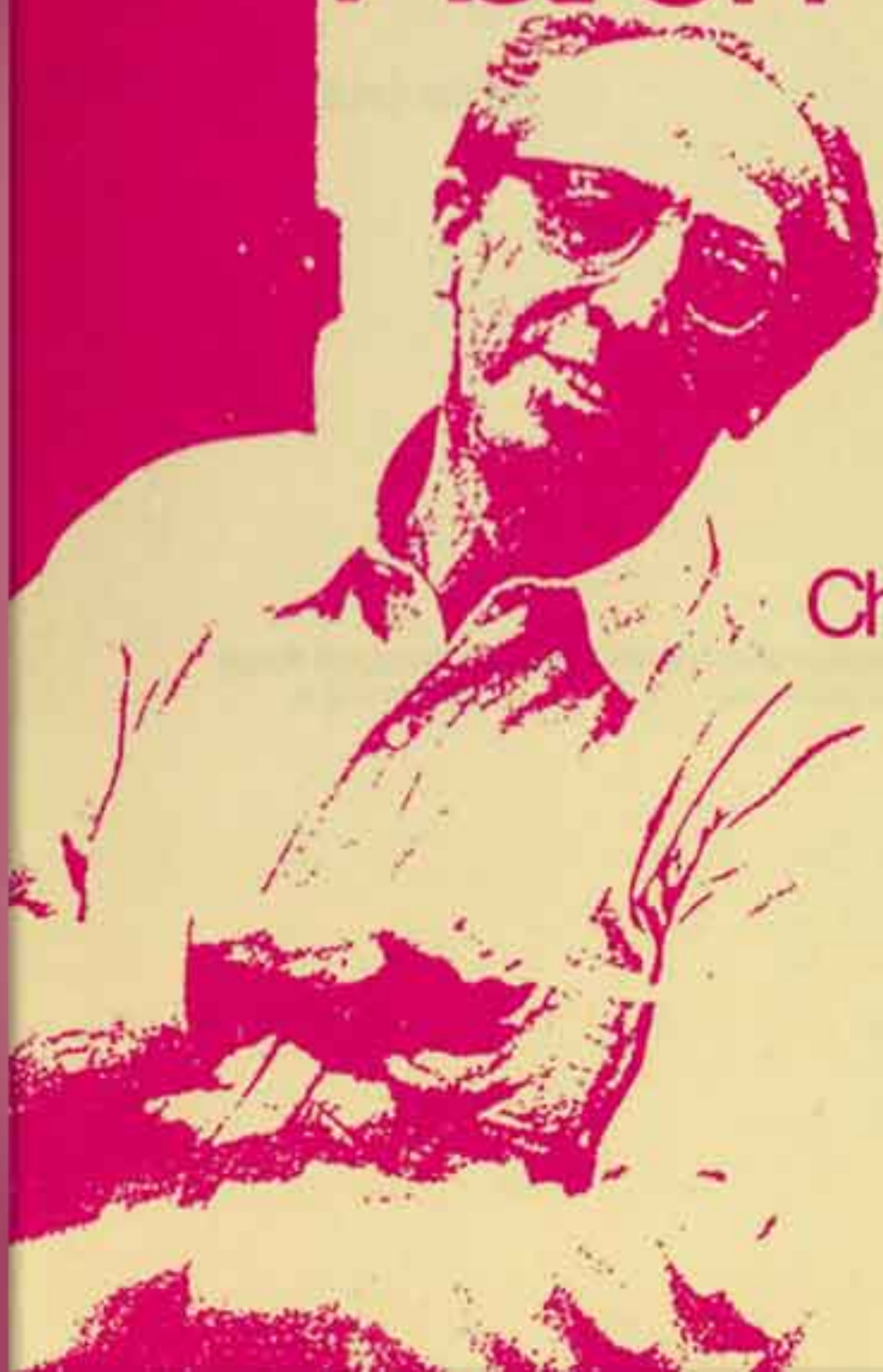


D/CD 1013

Aaron Copland



- Piano Fantasy
- Piano Variations
 - Passacaglia
- Night Thoughts
(Homage to Ives)

Charles Fierro • Piano



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AARON COPLAND

D/CD 1013

- 1 Piano Fantasy (28:26)
- 2 Passacaglia (6:42)
- 3 Night Thoughts (6:47)
- 4 Piano Variations (9:36)

Charles Fierro, piano

Total Playing Time: 51:53

Printed in U.S.A.

Several times during his career, Aaron Copland has turned to his "native" instrument, the piano, and enriched its literature with significant and substantial works. His keyboard catalogue includes, in addition to the four pieces on this disc, the *Scherzo Humoristique* (The Cat and the Mouse) of 1920, the *Piano Concerto* (1926), the *Piano Sonata* (1939-41), four *Piano Blues* (published in 1949) and an assortment of shorter works for young players.

Copland's endowments were apparent from the beginning. The *Passacaglia* (1922) reveals the young composer not only in command of his craft, but with something important to say. Dedicated to Nadia Boulanger, to whom Copland had entrusted his advanced training in Paris, the *Passacaglia* continues French neo-classical traditions in its serious intent, logical organization and omnipresent tonality (G-sharp minor). Its searching eight-measure bass theme, reappearing in counterpoint to chromatic lines, in arpeggiated figuration and in *ostinati*, is sometimes expanded or foreshortened, with motivic elements emphasized for their structural value.

The *Piano Variations* were considered revolutionary when they appeared in 1930. By that time Copland had his own ideas and he had developed a highly individual manner of expressing them. It was a style as virtuosic as Liszt's, but used to create a new sound-world of angular beauty - taut, dramatic, economical. Each variation, clearly delineated in character, explores the latent possibilities of the opening four-note motto (E, C, D-sharp, C-sharp) and of the ten-measure theme as a whole. Harmonic confrontations and reiterative, irregular metres accumulate to forge many diverse moods. At its climax, the music seems to enact a life-death struggle between sound and silence.

Night Thoughts, composed for the 1973 Van Cliburn Piano Competition, challenges the interpreter's powers of introspection. Subtitled "Homage to Ives," the music, whether tender or impassioned, remains lyrical throughout. Simple melodies, sensitively shaded textures and eloquent polytonal harmonies contribute to the evocative atmosphere of this short essay. The horn-call question with which it begins receives its expected answer only in the final measures.

In his epic *Piano Fantasy* (1955-57), commissioned by the Juilliard School of music and dedicated to the memory of pianist William Kapell, Copland has created a visionary work of extraordinary scope. The music ranges far and wide with seemingly

inexhaustible imagination. Supporting the diversity of ideas is a monumental arch: Slow-Fast-Slow, a plan favored by the composer. Declamatory single notes and clangorous fourth-chords announce the first and last parts. Aside from these landmarks, however, the great arch is elaborated by numerous contrasting subsections, developments, transitions and reminiscences. The concluding pages attain a sublime transcendence.

Charles Fierro

Reviewing an all-Copland piano recital, which also included the *Sonata*, Albert Goldberg wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "To play all these works in one session is a formidable undertaking and Fierro met the challenge with massive authority and assurance. His technique was at all times unimpeachable; the most difficult demands were mastered effortlessly. He stirred up immense storms of sound without pounding and he was equally successful in realizing the most evanescent tonal effects. It was a strikingly impressive exhibition of piano playing and of musical comprehension."

Since graduating from the University of Southern California, where he earned a doctorate "with distinction," Charles Fierro has performed American music widely in the United States and Europe. In 1976 he played a pair of Bicentennial recitals at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., and an all-Copland recital at the Palais de Fontainebleau, France, at the invitation of Nadia Boulanger.

He appears regularly at the historic Monday Evening Concerts in Los Angeles, where he has given the West Coast premieres of new works by Crumb, Rorem, Cage, Wuorinen, Dahl, Del Tredici, Davidovsky, Takemitsu, Krenek, Goehr and many others.

He has recorded the piano music of Ingolf Dahl and has appeared as soloist in Mozart and Beethoven concertos on orchestral programs, and as an interpreter of Schumann, Liszt, Schoenberg and Ives at the Ojai Festivals.

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Art Direction and Design:
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"I'm very pleased indeed with what you did with the Piano Fantasy. I think it is a first-rate rendition, and makes the piece seem shorter than it really is. To encompass a half-hour work with the assurance and musicality you bring to it is quite a feat!"

– Aaron Copland in a 1976 letter to Mr. Fierro

"Charles Fierro's (all-Copland) concert in Fontainebleau remains memorable. Most musical understanding. Masterly technique."

– Nadia Boulanger

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