

**Da Capo Concert Band: An American Journey**  
**Programme Notes**

**The Big Country (1958)**

***Jerome Moross (1913 - 1983), arr. Leslie Statham***

Jerome Moross was a New Yorker, who studied music at New York University and the Juilliard School of Music. He wrote in a variety of styles, but is best known for his Westerns. Moross' music was instinctively 'American'. He loved folk tunes and popular songs of his day and was inspired by indigenous music.

In 1948, Moross began working as a composer in Hollywood. The Big Country is the best known of his seventeen film scores and recognized as a 'Western' classic. He fell in love with the prairie lands of the mid-West when he stopped off on a bus trip from Chicago to Hollywood in 1936. He described arriving in the plains as a religious experience. When it came to writing the main theme of The Big Country, he said that he wrote the string figure (played here by the flutes and clarinets) almost automatically.

Although critical response to the film was mixed, the score is so indelible and agile that it plays more like a ballet and is certainly the equal of Aaron Copland's ballet scores.

**Waltz and Celebration from 'Billy the Kid' (1938)**

***Aaron Copland (1900 - 1990), arr. Philip J Lang***

Aaron Copland only began to show an interest in music in his teens. After attending his first concert at age 15, Copland decided to become a composer. In 1920 he went to France to study at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau. On his return in 1924, he was determined to create a distinctively American music that would withstand the test of time.

In 1938, Copland wrote the Wild West ballet, 'Billy the Kid', for the American Ballet Caravan. His inspiration was Walter Noble Burns' best-seller 'The Saga of Billy the Kid'. Billy is remembered as one of the most notorious characters of the frontier Southwest. He was said to have killed a man for each of his twenty-one years. Copland preferred to portray Billy as "a legendary young innocent who went wrong" and not the monster he was.

The Waltz, based on an old cowboy song is from near the end of the ballet where it is danced by Billy and his Mexican sweetheart. The Celebration Dance is danced by the 'Cowboys and Gun-Girls' after Billy the Kid has been captured following a gunfight. Listen for the sinister, biting quality created by setting the melody and bass lines in different keys. Copland utilized this musical effect at the request of the Choreographer and lead dancer who wanted to create a macabre polka.

**East Coast Pictures (1985)**

***Shelter Island; The Catskills; New York  
Nigel Hess (b. 1953)***

Nigel Hess read music at Cambridge University, where he was Music Director of the famous Footlights Revue Company. He has since worked extensively as a composer in television, theatre and film. His most recent feature films are Oscar Wilde's 'An Ideal Husband' and 'Ladies in Lavender', starring Judi Dench and Maggie Smith. His works are regarded as core repertoire for the wind band.

These three short 'pictures' were inspired by several visits by the composer to a small part of the USA's East Coast, an area that provides great extremes in the geography and the people. Shelter Island is a small island situated almost at the end of Long Island, a few hours' drive east of New York. In the summer it becomes a crowded tourist trap, but in the winter it is gloriously deserted, and bravely faces the onslaught of the turbulent Atlantic, shrouded in sea mists and driving rain.

In upstate New York lie the Catskill Mountains, an extraordinary combination of tranquility and power, peace and majesty. Once seen they call you back again and again.

For anyone who is familiar with New York, or to be precise, Manhattan, this particular 'picture' needs no explanation. For those not yet hooked, here is a foretaste of things to come.

**Cole Porter Selection**

***Cole Porter (1891 - 1964), arr. Warren Barker***

By the age of ten, Cole Porter had written his first song, 'Song of the Birds'. He studied at Yale where he wrote two of their best known football songs, which are still sung today. He debuted on Broadway in 1928 with 'Paris', including the song 'Let's Do It, Let's Fall In Love'. From the mid-'20s to the mid-'50s, Cole Porter was a one-man industry, both on Broadway and in Hollywood. His songs have long since become a lasting, universal language, from the flashy 'I Get a Kick Out of You' and 'Blow, Gabriel, Blow' to the romantic experimental ballads 'Night and Day' and 'Begin the Beguine'.

Tragedy struck in 1937, when he nearly lost his legs in a riding accident. His work following this in the early 1940s was inferior to earlier work. However, in 1948, Porter came up with the musical 'Kiss Me Kate', his biggest success, followed by 'Anything Goes'.

See if you can spot the nine show-stoppers featured in this medley!

**\*\* INTERVAL \*\***

### **Cuban Overture (1932)**

***George Gershwin (1898 - 1937), arr. Martin Koekelkoren***

Gershwin was born Jacob Gershovitz in Brooklyn, New York to Russian Jewish immigrant parents who changed their name after emigrating from St. Petersburg. Many of his skills as a composer are attributed to his teacher, Joseph Schillinger. However, this influence is often disputed by the Gershwin family. After the posthumous success of George and Ira's 'Porgy and Bess', Schillinger claimed a large and direct influence in overseeing the creation of the opera. Schillinger's influence is certainly to be seen in the 'Cuban Overture'.

The 'Cuban Overture' is a symphonic overture for orchestra, that was originally entitled 'Rumba'. It was a result of a two-week holiday which Gershwin took in Havana, Cuba in February 1932. The overture is dominated by Caribbean rhythms, with a wide spectrum of instrumental color and technique. It is a rich and exciting work with complexity and sophistication, illustrating the influence of Cuban music and dance

The premiere of 'Rumba' in August 1932 was a great success. However, Gershwin renamed the work 'Cuban Overture' three months later to avoid giving audiences the idea that it was simply a novelty item.

### **The Typewriter (1950)**

***Leroy Andersen (1908 - 1975), arr. Floyd E Werle***

Leroy Andersen was best known as an American composer of short, light concert music pieces. John Williams describes his as "one of the great American masters of light orchestral music". During World War II Andersen worked as a translator and intelligence officer at the Pentagon. His duties did not prevent him from composing and he wrote his first hit, 'Blue Tango', in 1951. This was the first ever instrumental recording to sell a million copies.

Andersen often employed creative instrumental effects out of items not used as musical instruments. The Typewriter is one such piece and is used as a theme for numerous radio programmes and television shows. Most recently, it can be heard on the News Quiz on Radio 4.

### **Suite of Old American Dances (1950)**

***Cake Walk; Schottische; Western One-Step; Wallflower Waltz; Rag Robert Russell Bennett (1894 - 1980)***

Robert Russell Bennett was born to a tremendously musical family in Kansas City, Missouri. At the age of ten, his mother caught him playing ragtime on the piano and admonished him, telling him such music was trash. He thus learnt to be a "life-long musical snob".

Bennett began work as an arranger in 1919 and had close working relationships with both George Gershwin and Cole Porter. It is impossible to overestimate his importance to American popular music. The 'Broadway sound' admired worldwide is not simply the sound of American tunes, but the sound of America's best melodies arranged by Bennett for the orchestra pit. However, he struggled with his mother's disdain for popular music. One of his most popular 'serious' compositions was the Suite of Old American Dances.

An original concert band composition, the suite sets the mood of a Saturday night barn dance. It recalls several of the characteristic dances remembered from Bennett's childhood. He describes it as "native American dance forms...treated in a 'riot' of instrumental colours".

The Cake Walk is a strutting dance based on a march rhythm, often performed at minstrel shows; it originated as a competition among Black dancers to win a cake. The Schottische is a Scotch round dance in 2/4 time, similar to the polka, only slower. The third movement, Western One-Step, recalls a variant of an early ballroom dance that was a precursor to the foxtrot. The triple meter of the Wallflower Waltz will be familiar to most, and conjures images of a lone would-be dancer with no partner. The bright and highly syncopated rhythm of the Rag completes the dance suite.

### **Liberty Bell (1893)**

***John Philip Sousa (1854 - 1932)***

John Sousa was a talented musician born in Washington, D.C. At the age of six he demonstrated perfect pitch. His father, a trombonist in the Marine Band, enlisted him in the US Marine Corps as an apprentice aged 14. He soon attempted to run away and join the circus, but served for seven years until 1875, having learnt to play all the wind instruments and the violin! After a brief period learning conducting in a pit orchestra, he returned in 1880 as the head of the US Marine Band.

The Liberty Bell march is in typical Sousa style, full of bouncy rhythms with melodic and stirring orchestration. It is one of Sousa's finest marches, bringing the audience's attention to the Liberty Bell itself through the use of 'chimes' during the trio. It is said the themes come from a whistling tune, much like Kenneth Alford's 'Colonel Bogey'.

Liberty Bell was used as the theme for the popular comedy series 'Monty Python's Flying Circus'. It was chosen for its bouncy, catchy melodies and because it was in the public domain and free from royalties, the Monty Python crew having no budget left over to spend on theme music.