

Aaron Copland (1900-1990), Piano Concerto (1926)

(1)

“Copland’s Piano Concerto shows a shocking lack of taste, of proportion. After thunderous, blaring measures in which one brass instrument vies with another in arrogant announcement, there are gentle purposeless measures for the piano, which is struck by fingers apparently directed at random, as a child amuses itself by making noises when it is restless in the room. Let us not forget that the leading English reviewers characterized Schumann’s Symphony in B-flat when they first heard it as belonging to the ‘Broken Crockery School.’ Our objection to Mr. Copland’s broken crockery is that it is not of the first quality.”

Philip Hale, Boston *Herald*, January 29, 1927

(2)

“If there exists anywhere in the world a stranger concatenation of meaninglessly ugly sounds and distorted rhythms than Mr. Copland’s Piano Concerto, Boston has been spared it. Since there must be a bit of jazz in all American music nowadays, Mr. Copland has his measures in that view, but as one young man in the audience remarked, ‘No dance-hall would tolerate jazz of such utter badness’.”

Warren Stokey Smith, Boston *Post*, January 29, 1927

(3)

“The jazz theme was a pretty poor pick, as those things go. But Mr. Copland surrounded it with all the machinery of sound and fury, and the most raucous modernistic fury at that. The composer-pianist smote his instrument at random; the orchestra, under the impassioned baton of Mr. Koussevitzky, heaved and shrieked and fumed and made anything but sweet moans until both pianist and conductor attained such a climax of absurdity that many in the audience giggled with delight. Mr. Copland was evidently seriously engaged in saying something of vital importance to himself, and played away, frantically aided and abetted by the orchestra, which made barnyard and stable noises in the intervals of proclaiming imposing Scriabinish fanfare.”

Samuel Chotzinoff, New York *World*, February 4, 1927

(4)

“Mr. Copland’s Piano Concerto opens with a tremendous fracas... There are gargantuan dance measures, as of a herd of elephants engaged in jungle rivalry of the Charleston and dances further south. Rhythm runs away with rhythm and key shatters its sabre against key... A curious and puzzling performance, this Concerto.”

Pitts Sanborn, New York *Telegram*, February 4, 1927

(5)

“The Copland Piano Concerto is a harrowing horror from beginning to end. There is nothing in it that resembles music except as it contains noise—just as the words employed by Gertrude Stein may be said to resemble poetry because poetry consists of words, and so does her crazy clatter.”

Copland's music is not 'new music.' It seems to be dissonance for the sake of dissonance. It is of all sounds the most illogical, the most anti-human. The piano part of the composition is not played but merely happened upon at random, as it might be if the performer struck the keyboard with his elbows instead of his fingers."

Editorial in the Boston *Evening Transcript*, February 5, 1927