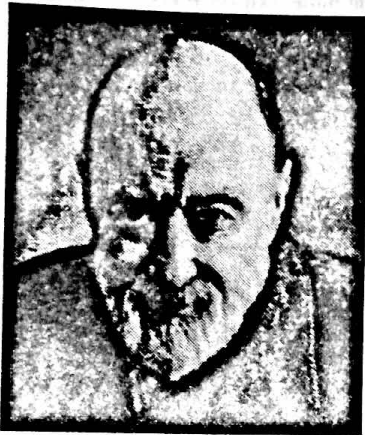


## The American School

In Ives's *The Unanswered Question*, two different groups of instruments play completely different music at the same time. In "Putnam's Camp," from *Three Places in New England*, he portrays two bands marching past each other playing different music.



Charles Ives

A distinctive American style has developed over the course of the twentieth century. Although some of the composers presented here lived past the mid-century mark, their music is a continuation of the nationalist movement begun in the first half of the century.

Charles Ives (1874–1954) was the first great American composer, but his genius was not recognized until he was an old man. He studied organ, piano, cornet and composition, but decided that he could not make a living as a composer and went into the insurance business. For twenty years, Ives worked at night, on weekends, during vacations, piling up compositions that nobody ever heard. He tried to interest several conductors and performers in his works, but they said no one could play them. In 1919, Ives published his *Concord Sonata* privately. It had its first public performance 20 years later, and suddenly the critics were calling his work "the greatest music composed by an American." In 1947, his Third Symphony won the Pulitzer Prize. Ives works have the flavour of small-town New England; he wove in snatches of hymn tunes, marches and popular songs, and wrote about the Fourth of July, baseball games and Thanksgiving. He also used dissonance and wrote for a piano tuned in quarter tones. The score might tell the pianist to use an elbow or a board to push down many keys at once.

## The American School

**A**my Cheney Beach (1867–1944) was the first major American woman composer and the first to write a symphony. She was also a talented pianist with a concert career. She composed 110 songs, piano pieces, chamber music, choral works, a piano concerto and a one-act opera.

Ruth Crawford (1901–1953) was known more as a collector of folk songs than as a composer during her lifetime. She taught in Florida and in Illinois before moving to New York to study composition with Charles Seeger, her future husband. The first woman to win a Guggenheim Fellowship in composition, she wrote her most important work, the String Quartet, while studying in Berlin. Her other works include two sets of songs based on the poetry of Carl Sandberg, various suites, piano works, and *Risselty Rosselty* for Small Orchestra. After she married, she largely gave up composing and worked with her husband collecting American folk songs. This work undoubtedly had a powerful effect on her stepson, Pete Seeger, who became a very well-known American folk singer.



Ruth Crawford

Ruth Crawford's compositions were largely ignored in her lifetime, but have enjoyed a resurgence in the decades since her death.

## The American School



Aaron Copland

Born in Brooklyn, NY, Aaron Copland (1900–1990) went to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger, arguably the most famous composition teacher of this century. When Copland came home, he decided to write in an American-based style. He began by integrating jazz idioms like syncopated rhythms and jazz chord combinations into his compositions. In addition, he turned to specifically American themes for his inspiration: the ballets *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo* are about cowboys, *Appalachian Spring* is the story of a pioneer wedding in Pennsylvania. Another technique he used to make his music sound more American was to incorporate folk songs, and hymn tunes, like the old Shaker song "Simple Gifts" and the passages that sound like a country fiddler in *Appalachian Spring*.



Copland conducting

During the war he wrote *Lincoln Portrait*, which incorporated a narrator reading from Lincoln's actual speeches, and the *Fanfare for the Common Man* for brass and percussion, a work which audiences still find stirring. He also began to work on film scores like *Our Town*, *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and Men*, which are based on American stories. Copland wrote three symphonies, the most important being the Third. He also wrote an opera, *The Tender Land*, chamber music, music for piano, and a song cycle called *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*.



Martha Graham was one of the creators of modern dance in the early twentieth century. She commissioned and choreographed Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

## The American School

Leonard Bernstein's work ranged from serious symphonic music to Broadway musicals, from jazz to Jewish sacred music. He was also a distinguished conductor who popularized serious music in North America through the medium of television. He was musical director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958 to 1968, and most of his compositions date from before or after this period. His two symphonies, *Jeremiah* and *The Age of Anxiety*, are in the tradition of Mahler, Alban Berg and Shostakovich, whereas his works for Broadway, the ballet *Fancy Free*, and the musicals *On the Town*, *Candide* and the immensely successful *West Side Story*, show a completely different style. His sacred music includes the *Chichester Psalms*, settings in Hebrew for choir and orchestra, another work in Hebrew, the *Kaddish* Symphony, and his *Mass*, a setting of the Roman Catholic liturgy.



Leonard Bernstein  
(1918–1990)

Bernstein conducted  
with tremendous  
passion and intensity.