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The American Homophilic School of Composition

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THE AMERICAN HOMOPHILIC SCHOOL OF COMPOSITION

By

Rik Noyce

A doctoral document submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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ABSTRACT

The Homophilic School of Composition

by

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A small enclave of gay composers in New York, led by Aaron Copland (1900-1990) and Virgil Thomson (1896-1989), established a distinct twentieth-century musical sound that became synonymous with America. Copland and Thomson were prominent among a group of gifted gay musicians and conductors in New York in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. While perhaps not self-identifying as gay, as the term had not yet been coined, they did however acknowledge, honor, and support one another’s lives as being homosexual. Is it possible that something as seemingly unrelated as sexual preference could, in fact, impact a musical style?

In this document, the author will consider what these great composers’ homosexuality may have had to do with their music making and how their gay social network—specifically during the height of the American Homophile Movement—supported a form of expression that directly influenced one another’s compositional techniques. In addition
to examining well-known works, the author will focus on two specific works for flute, Copland’s *Duo for Flute and Piano* and Thomson’s *Sonata for Flute Alone*. The exploration of these works, and the highlighting of the many similarities between them, will serve as an example of the mutual influence these composers had upon one another.

Arguably, Aaron Copland is considered one of America’s most notable composers. For many people, his music has become synonymous with American pride and culture in the twentieth century. It may be heard today in television advertisements and movie trailers as well in concert halls, and is often used to evoke an American spirit. In fact, it has been called the quintessential “American sound” by many critics and commentators. Virgil Thomson, composer and music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*, also had significant influence in the development of a uniquely recognizable American sound. However, the compositions of Thomson are often eclipsed by, and do not retain the equivalent and widespread notoriety, of the compositions of Copland.

What is often misunderstood today is that the unique quality of composition that Thomson began, while collaborating with famed lesbian writer Gertrude Stein on the opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, greatly influenced the compositional style of Aaron Copland.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The course of musicology has altered and increased significantly in scope since the formalization of the discipline in the late nineteenth century. Guido Adler, in his 1885 article *Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft*, defined the scope, method, and aim of musicology that in many respects remains relevant today.\(^1\) Since then, musicology has traditionally been “somewhat reluctant to engage with various critical approaches to difference (feminist theory, minoritarian discourse, etc.) that are well established in ethnic studies, women’s studies, and culture studies.”\(^2\) However, with time there has been an expansion of study within the discipline that has added to the traditional narratives of music history, analysis, and criticism, to include many other diverse topics such as linguistics, acoustics, and sociology.

Musicology has traditionally relied on methods borrowed from other  

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disciplines to assemble an enhanced, richer, and more holistic body of musical research. Since its inception, a major emphasis in empirical musicology has been the discovery and recovery of musical documents, and the systematic notation of objective facts about those documents. A second emphasis, focusing on theoretical and philosophical ideas, developed alongside these empirical studies. This theoretical-philosophical emphasis had two different aspects: one “addressed general historiographical problems such as change and causality ... and one considered issues specific to the histories of the arts and literature, such as the forms and style, or the historical meaning or content of individual art works, ... aesthetics or socio-cultural contexts and functions.”

Today, rather than focus exclusively on the evidence of a discovered manuscript, most musicologists also proceed from the assumption that music is unique to individual societies, influenced by cultural contexts and collective ways of life, and may represent the unique spiritual and moral ethics of that particular society. This focus on extra-musical contexts and concerns has led to the *periodization* of music and its practitioners. Individuals and groups in each period in musical history—

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indeed any history—have influenced the identifiable characteristics particular to that social environment. We continue to support this notion and teach with this understanding. At its best, this approach provides music scholars a plausible account of historical events and their influences on compositional styles.

Periodization invoked another philosophy, the *Zeitgeist* theory. This theory purported that there is a common cultural ethos that defines the art and music of a particular period. Later, those who held relativist and post-modernist views challenged these ideas and asserted that there was, in fact, no stable or underlying purpose to anything.

The issues raised by the relativist and post-modern views allowed for yet another perspective to gain favor. It focused on the unique social influences and culture in which music was composed. By the 1990s, musicologists witnessed two important developments, “the arrival of multiculturalism in the academy and the ascendance of cultural studies in the humanities.” Therefore, contemporary musicology emerged as a true synthesis of many of these earlier approaches. What grew from this synthesis of ideas was a trend toward a new and more holistic approach to music research. Under this purview, music cannot and should not be considered without also carefully considering the unique societal influences that most certainly have influenced its composition and use.

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4 Wong, 259.
In this paper, the author will examine the extent to which the sexual identities of two great composers—Aaron Copland (1900-1990) and Virgil Thomson (1896-1989)—may have influenced their music making, and how their homosexual social network supported a form of expression that is reflected in both men’s compositional techniques. In addition to discussing other well-known works, the author will focus on the comparison of two specific works for solo flute: Copland’s *Duo for Flute and Piano* (1971) and Thomson’s *Sonata for Flute Alone* (1944). The exploration of these works and their many similarities reveals the mutual influence these composers had upon one another and the new compositional techniques that emerged from their association.

If it is possible that sexual identity could determine or at least influence the historical experience of prejudice, discrimination, and oppression based on sexual identity, it also provides the necessary political backdrop for a transformative moment in American music. Therefore, the point of departure for this study is best situated with French compositional pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger. Many of Boulanger’s American students, including Copland and Thomson, were gay. These two particular men studied with Boulanger in Paris in the 1920s and later returned to the United States to form a uniquely influential group in musical history, one that the author is recognizing as The American Homophilic School of Composition.
Situating the American Homophilic School

The nature of historiological research requires one to reflect back in time, study the known or newly identified data, make plausible connections, and assert new theories based upon that information. Likewise, western musicologists, using a variety of approaches already discussed, have scrutinized the history of music. Among many observations, they have come to recognize various trends and have identified particularly influential groups of musicians, thus asserting that particular groups and trends are especially worthy of note.

Music history textbooks, and indeed the lexicon of articles of the American Musicology Society, routinely include discussion of these types of groups and schools of thought with regard to the societal influences on the musical art of particular periods in history. Although some did so, most members, patrons, or students of historically acknowledged schools of thought did not necessarily identify themselves as belonging or subscribing to a particular school at the time of its formation. Indeed, many of the musicians came together as a means of supporting new musical ideas and concertizing. Others came together to make statements through their art about political issues of the day. Still others focused exclusively on creating their musical art and passed their knowledge, skills, and approach to music making on to the students and followers.
Musical scholars, as example, routinely speak authoritatively about the “Second Viennese School,” “Les Six,” the “School of Notre Dame,” or the “Russian Mighty Handful.” They outline in great detail both the social influences upon these groups and that which they bore upon their respective society. Because of this, we are able reflect upon respective groups and identify how their compositional peculiarities influenced the work of others, and are therefore intrinsic to an era.

The central assertion in this paper is that a small enclave of gay composers in New York, led by Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson, established a new and distinct twentieth-century American musical sonority that became synonymous with American populist ideas. Implied within this assertion is the legitimization and recognition of a previously unrecognized aspect of this well-known group of musicians. Both men were prominent among a group of gifted gay musicians and conductors in New York in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. While perhaps not self-identifying as gay, as the term had not yet been coined, they did acknowledge, honor, and support one another’s lives as being homosexual.

Aaron Copland is considered one of America’s most notable composers. His music has become synonymous with American pride and culture in the twentieth century. He has, in fact, been deemed the “Dean of American Music.” Copland’s music has the sound of “wide-
open prairies and Appalachian springs.” It is often used today in television advertisements, movie trailers, and concert halls to evoke a spirit of America. This is true also of the works of Virgil Thomson as well, but to a significantly lesser-acknowledged degree. Thomson’s close collaboration with Gertrude Stein ultimately inspired a simpler compositional language than was en vogue in the early twentieth century, and upon which Copland later capitalized and became most famous.

Other important members of their circle include Leonard Bernstein, Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles and Samuel Barber. For example, the works of Leonard Bernstein—even a few notes of West Side Story conjures 1950s New York City—left an indelible mark on classical music-making in this country. Likewise, Ned Rorem, a self-proclaimed protégé of both Copland and especially Thomson, altered the course of vocal music in America.

These men did not work alone developing their artistic ideas. As composers throughout history have done, they influenced one another. They formed an intertwined network of creativity and mutual support, a small community Rorem describes as being “governed by Aaron Copland

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and Virgil Thomson,\textsuperscript{6} whose bonds ran deeper than might initially seem apparent. These men acknowledged and supported one another as gay men and their shared social and political experiences shaped their individual art and collective artistic sensibilities. The result was dramatic. The music they composed spoke directly to the nationalistic sensibility of the American public in the early- and mid-twentieth century, and continues to represent such in all manner of public concert, national holiday, television, and film.

\textsuperscript{6} Ned Rorem, \textit{Knowing When to Stop} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 207.
CHAPTER 2

HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE HOMOPHILE MOVEMENT

Until the early 1970s, the American Psychiatric Association considered homosexuality to be a mental illness. It is referred to as such in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the authoritative guide for medical professionals and psychologists charged with identifying and treating patients with mental health issues. The history of the medicalization of homosexuality is but one example of the institutionalized homophobia—a contempt for gays and lesbians so deeply-embedded in culture that discrimination seems natural and inevitable—that helps to explain the relationship between twentieth-century American society and its gay citizens. In the decades leading up to 1970, this relationship was at best uneasy, and for many in the nation’s urban cultural centers such as New York, it was often brutally oppressive. Jeffrey Weeks argues that while early work such as Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (1897) and later Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) demonstrated that “homosexual behavior has existed in a variety of different cultures, and that it is an ineradicable part of human sexual
possibility,” the dominant attitude toward homosexuality remained hostile. It was driven by the assumption that homosexual behavior was a perversion that ran counter to some imagined natural or, in some cases, divine law.

For example, in 1533, England’s Henry VIII “first brought ‘buggery’ within the scope of statute law ... all acts of buggery were equally condemned as being ‘against nature’ ... the penalty for ‘the abominable vice of buggery’ was death, and the death penalty—typically by means of hanging—continued on the statute books, formally at least, until 1861.” At that time, the sentence for buggery was reduced to the more humane lengthy imprisonment from ten years to life with hard manual labor. It would be another one hundred years before homosexuality was decriminalized in England and the United Kingdom.

For several hundred years, homosexuals have been oppressed and demonized by those who hold certain western societal views, particularly those stemming from religious doctrines. It is no accident, certainly, that homosexual relations are described as “sodomy” well into the late twentieth century, or that the term itself invokes a biblical story that

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8 This antiquated British term refers to the act of male sodomy.

9 Weeks, 99.
ends in the violent deaths of “sodomites.” Despite this long tradition, there is ample anthropological and sociological evidence that inclusion, rather than exclusion, has an equally valid history.

In many other cultures throughout history, forms of homosexuality have not only been tolerated but rather deeply integrated into social structure, sometimes even revered. One such example is “in the form of the socially accepted pedagogic relations common to ancient Greece”\(^\text{10}\) where, still today, it is common for a man to have a very close and often sexual relationship with a much younger “boy”—typically a teenaged youth who was clearly well into or just past puberty, yet also young and unmarried.\(^\text{11}\) The sexual character of these relationships was often symbolic, and reflected the norms of propriety governing the sexual behavior of men, both in terms of social responsibility and self-control.\(^\text{12}\) In these ancient Greek forms, homosexuality was associated with youth and the seeking of pleasure, but there was not a pattern of life-long identification as homosexual. Indeed, to remain committed to the sexual patterns of young men marked a man as irresponsible and lacking in self-control.

\(^{10}\) Weeks, 99.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.

In other cultures, homosexuality was actually sought out and even revered, as in the berdache\textsuperscript{13} of Native American societies. In many of these societies, male children who displayed homosexual characteristics were seen as a bridge between the sexes and a blessing to the greater tribal good. They were typically apprenticed to a shaman for training in the traditional work of both sexes and usually dressed in traditional female attire. They were revered as understanding both sides of the human condition and functioned as tribal healers or high priests. Interestingly, in these characteristically polygamist societies, tribal warriors often took berdache men as one of multiple wives. It was also considered a great blessing for a warrior to be sexually intimate with a berdache before going off to battle.\textsuperscript{14} The hijra of India offer a similar example of acceptance and integration. Also referred to as the kothi in the Kama Sutra, these individuals perform special blessings at weddings and the births of children, and perform other ritual tasks. The contributions of the hijra are seen as integral to society, and the kothi themselves are recognized as a group with relatively high social status.

In the music profession—particularly in the puritanical United States—homosexuality has historically been frowned upon, and judged

\textsuperscript{13} Refers to the native-American ideology of a “two-spirited” people.

\textsuperscript{14} Richard C. Trexler, “Making the American Berdache: Choice or Constraint?” \textit{Journal of Social History} 35.3 (2002), 613.
as incongruent with success, despite the awareness and acceptance of individual homosexuals within its ranks. To some, the idea that music as a profession has helped sustain the suppression of homosexual and other diverse voices seems counterintuitive. Deborah Wong recalls one example as she remembers Bruce Robbins discussing the academic climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Robbins noted that universities “were ‘othered’ by the conservative media when it became evident that the ferment of multicultural education was changing the very conception of public culture. He writes that the sudden enthusiasm for trashing academe in the early 1990s was meant ‘to reprovincealize American culture, [and] to tighten up the limits of who will be counted in its culture.’”15

Indeed, the arts are often presumed to be a sort of safe haven for those whose gender expression is inconsistent with social expectations. Throughout most of the twentieth century, however, this safe haven relied upon the institutionalized patterns of marginalization that have come to be associated with “the closet” in the United States. The political climate in France, where both Thomson and Copland were studying with Boulanger in the 1920s, was much more liberal. Sexual expression, including homosexuality, was not vilified in the same manner and sexual freedom was celebrated in the arts, particularly in literature. Indeed,

15 Wong, 261.
this freedom of climate allowed both Thomson and Copland to explore and freely experience their lives as open homosexuals, an experience they brought with them when they repatriated to the United States.

**Working in the Closet: Musicians in Twentieth-Century America**

“Every profession is a secret society. The musical profession is more secret than most, on account of the nature of music itself. No other field of human activity is quite so hermetic, so isolated.”¹⁶ These words of Virgil Thomson have deeper meaning than may initially appear, describing at once experiences within the music profession as well as the contours of gay identity. Interpreted from the vantage of the closet—that vernacular term that describes the keeping of one’s sexual orientation secret for the sake of living comfortably in society—there was, and for many still is, an isolation within the musical profession which extends beyond the study, discipline, and practice of music. For Thomson and his contemporaries, the closed was a very real strategy for dealing not only with one’s public life, but also for dealing with one’s career as a musician. Music, like many other fields and professions, has been slow to dismantle the closet, and has been similarly slow to recognize how the

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unique contributions of performers, composers, and pedagogues have been influenced by their experiences as gay people. This historical sluggishness reflects the larger social and political story of homophobia in American culture.

Being homosexual in the essentially puritanical social climate of mid-twentieth-century American culture was a risky prospect, to say the least. In short, it was safer to be closeted in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Countless narratives exist of brutal consequences to having been *outed* in society. While Copland, Thomson and their gay colleagues came of age as artists and matured over these three decades, the United States was strengthening its commitment to maintaining “the closet” through what sociologist Steve Seidman calls “heterosexual domination.”

The closet is a way of adjusting to a society that aggressively enforces heterosexuality as a preferred way of life. In the era of the closet, heterosexual dominance works not only by championing a norm of heterosexuality but also by demonizing homosexuality. The making of a culture of homosexual pollution is basic to the creation of the closet. Enforcing the exclusion of homosexuals from public life also involves aggressive institutional repression. Homosexuals are suppressed by means of laws, policing practices, civic disenfranchisement, and harassment and violence. The state has been a driving force in the making of the closet. To the extent that heterosexual privilege is enforced by keeping homosexuals silent and invisible, we can speak of a condition of heterosexual domination.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^\text{17}\) “Coming out” and its active verb “outing” refer to a gay person’s act of informing friends and family of his or her sexual orientation in an effort live openly in society.

What Seidman describes is the cultural climate of urban America in the middle of the twentieth century, the climate that existed prior to the civil rights movement, prior to the women’s rights movement, and most certainly prior to what we have come to understand as the gay rights movement. During this period, gay and lesbian people stood to lose more than social status or acceptance, but also were likely to endure discrimination at work and from government institutions, housing discrimination, as well as ridicule and violence in the streets. Almost all gay men (and women) were at serious risk of being imprisoned for the crime of not being heterosexual. Nevertheless, in New York and other major American cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles, there was a complex and vibrant gay subculture in which the new urban homosexuals could, and did, participate.

In the early twentieth century, though punishment by death was not often exacted upon the offenders, little else had changed from Henry VIII’s four-hundred-year-old decree. In 1942, a police raid on a Brooklyn “black and tan,” resulted in the arrest of composer and chief music critic for the New York Herald Tribune, Virgil Thomson, among others.\(^\text{19}\) In early twentieth-century American vernacular, “black and tan” was a term for a secretive social gathering place such as a dinner and dancing club. Specifically in New York, these establishments were predominantly found

\(^{19}\) Hubbs, 69.
in African American neighborhoods in Harlem, where Caucasian and African American men, socially uncharacteristic for the time, socialized and sought sexual partners. Though this raid may have taken Thomson and others by surprise, he was aware of the possibility as police stings in these Harlem clubs happened with great regularity. During this period a white, gay man who frequented such establishments was not only likely to experience harassment for his sexual proclivity, but also was likely to be punished for his crossing the color line—for fraternizing with or worse, having sexual relations with—African Americans. Most were aware of the earlier and very public Oscar Wilde case (London, 1895), and it had been less than two years since Thomson’s fellow composer, Henry Cowell, had been released from his four-year imprisonment at San Quentin on sodomy charges. Despite being granted a full pardon in 1942, his career never fully recovered. It would be many more years of police raids, arrests and imprisonments before the 1969 Stonewall Riots, which would alter the trajectory and character of the modern gay rights movement. This modern movement would bring to the fore an

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20 The June 27, 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay drag bar in New York City’s Greenwich Village, is generally considered the beginning of the twentieth-century gay rights movement. Though police raids at gay bars were commonplace, this was the first time in history a large group of homosexuals, particularly drag queens, resisted arrest. This began a series of conflicts between homosexuals and New York City Police, which spread to other areas of the country, including Los Angeles and San Francisco.
open activism that celebrated difference—indeed, took pride in this difference. It rallied gay and lesbian people to challenge antiquated and religiously biased laws and the severe punishments that had been the hallmark of heterosexual domination and discrimination against homosexuals

**Gay Rights Movement**

The term *homophile* and the accompanying movement were prevalent, and in fact preferred, in the early part of the twentieth century. The term was used partly in an effort to reduce the focus on sex in clinical words like “homosexual” and to minimize the association of gay people with sexual behaviors that were negatively stigmatized. The homophile movement was most active and visible from the 1930s through the early 1970s. The more highly publicized and familiar modern gay activist movement that began with the Stonewall Riots in 1969 often eclipses the precursory homophile movement.

The homophile movement has intellectual roots in Europe in the late nineteenth century when important writings, including those of Havelock Ellis, argued for the decriminalization of homosexuality. The movement’s nineteenth century germination in activism for decriminalization quickly shifted to represent a group of people who “endeavored to advance the
cause of equal rights for homosexuals through conformance [sic] with the heterosexual norms prevalent at the time.”

The movement embodied a sense of conformity, assimilation and apparent integration into society. Essentially, the homophile movement sought to challenge the negative stereotypes of “the homosexual” as being perverse, predatory, effeminate, or mentally ill. Rather, it sought to represent homosexuals as more similar to heterosexuals than dissimilar: equal, legitimate, and inextricably valuable to greater society.

The earliest American homophile group was founded in 1924 in Chicago with its philosophy of public conformance disseminated through a newsletter. The founder, Henry Gerber, and his associates were arrested shortly thereafter in 1925, resulting in the termination of his career and the seizing of all the group’s materials. Gerber’s organization was not the last homophile group. Over the next several decades, as gay urban subcultures became increasingly well established and homosexuals visible in various areas of social life, the call for political and social equality became more urgent. The Mattachine Society formed in 1951, aimed to educate the public and encourage political activism on behalf of the burgeoning homosexual community.

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22 Pettis, 1.
By 1953, the members of the Mattachine Society felt threatened by the emergence of McCarthyism. They ultimately adopted a less confrontational, more assimilationist ideology. Jeffrey Escoffier describes this “assimilationist position” as one that

...sought to achieve societal acceptance of homosexuals by emphasizing the similarities between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Proponents felt that the “secondary socialization” of homosexuals resulted from a life given over to hiding, isolation, and internalized self-hatred. For this reason, homosexuals should adopt a “pattern of behavior that is acceptable to society in general and compatible with [the] recognized institutions ... of home, church and state,” rather than creating an “ethical homosexual culture,” which would only accentuate the perceived differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals and provoke continued hostility. The “cultural minority” analysis was hotly debated in the early years of the Mattachine Society, but after many battles, marked also by anticommunism, the assimilationist thesis prevailed and served as the ideological basis for the homosexual rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s.23

Despite these early efforts, McCarthyism’s political extremes which have been described as “a time of police harassment, witch hunts, suspicions of disloyalty, and dismissals from jobs—often labeled homosexuals as deviants responsible for everything from neighborhood crime to the Cold War.”24 The assimilationist position taken by the


homophile movement was one that called for integration based upon similarity—on sameness. It would not be until the Stonewall Riots that gay liberation would become confrontational and would celebrate difference. It is the assimilationist politics that characterize the period during which Thomson, Copland, and the American Homophilic School was most productive.

Keeping Secrets

Despite these attempts and the continued growth of the movement, very real societal challenges still remained. In attempt to remain secretive to the outside and yet accessible to the chosen of their community, many unique communication techniques developed. Homosexuals communicated subtle underlying meanings to their acquaintances, using such simple devices as hand and body gestures and modes of dress. Thomson remembers, “You didn’t mention it, but you understood everything.”

There was also an interesting reinvention of word definitions into new connotations and speaking in code. Wayne Koestenbaum identifies perhaps one of the most interesting and still commonly used devices, a


25 Hubbs, 51.
concept later coined, “Divaspeak.” In this manner of speaking one “talks like Oscar Wilde … [and] *turns* a phrase and reverses it—substitutes praise for blame, pride for chagrin, authority for vacillation, salesmanship for silence.” Such an ability to speak in a codified manner and beautifully express it such that it exudes a multitude of layers may be seen as similar to the talent and techniques musicians use in molding a defined number of tones into a new and beautiful musical composition. This may also be one example of the gay “sensibilities,” to which some twenty-first-century musicologists, sometimes seen as radical in thought, refer and offer as evidence of a difference between gay and straight composers and their music. The author, however, is reminded of a comment by Ned Rorem in which he says there is no such thing as gay music, merely gay composers.

One such new connotation that became popular within the homosexual vernacular was that of the word “musical.” In a more formal

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26 This term, according to Koestenbaum, refers to a manner of speaking that is a language of “vindication and self-defense” in which one turns a phase to appear to be the opposite of what is actually so.


sense, calling oneself musical made an association with a special class of person—specifically those of special musical sensibilities and talent. So too, the homosexual connotation associated one with a special class of people of particular sensibilities, but it was not musical talent to which this coded word referred. An intimate friend of Thomson’s, Christopher Isherwood, recalls his gay uncle “using the slang expressions of his [1930s] generation … [as he] referred to himself as being ‘musical’ or ‘so.’”

This may be understood as one small example showing how the musical community held an understanding and tolerance for its own and yet also offered a means of mainstream disguise for homosexuals.

Another, more recent example of Divaspeak is exemplified in the community’s adoption of the words *queer* and *gay*. Originally referring to being odd, *queer* became a slang expression referring to homosexuals. In the 1980’s the term was embraced by the community and now commonly refers to being sexually alternative. “Many gays, transsexuals, bisexuals and even heterosexuals whose sexuality doesn't fit into the cultural standard of monogamous heterosexual marriage have adopted the "queer" label. In academic circles, the term "queer" often refers to the approaches and sensibilities of queer theory.”

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30 Hubbs, 67.

Merriam-Webster denotes being happily excited; keenly alive and exuberant; or having or inducing high spirits. This term came to popularity, replacing the very clinical term “homosexual” in the late twentieth century.

This is by no means an in-depth treatment on the subject of homosexual oppression in American society. However, it is important to grasp at least a cursory view of the very real pressures and risks one experienced in living one’s homosexuality in twentieth-century America. These societal pressures directly affected one’s ability to move through society, to feel safe in expressing one’s views, and certainly affected one’s life and creative ability. We must then acknowledge the likely effect upon the music that was composed. Social networks within this emerging homophilic society became systems of trust and support that helped to protect individuals, thus allowing them to be freely expressive in society.
“Manhattan during the war and up through the early 1950s was
governed by Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson, the father and mother
of American music.”32 According to Rorem, young composers chose one
composer or the other. A third option for those who were truly serious
about their compositional studies did not exist. Though both “parents”
had studied in Paris in the 1920s, Copland’s early work was a French
style deeply influenced by Stravinsky, which through the years had lost
favor with audiences. In fact, he was called the “Brooklyn Stravinsky.”33
Thomson’s own blend of the French style grew from Satie’s influence.
Though one might expect these differing styles to be the crux of students’
choice of compositional mentor, it often weighed less heavily than did the
personality traits and known sexual personae of the great composers
themselves.

32 Rorem, Knowing When to Stop, 280.

33 Arthur Berger, Aaron Copland, (New York: Oxford University Press,
1952), 42.
To many potential composition students, “entry to the Empire City through Virgil Thomson’s door would seem the ideal route.”\(^\text{34}\) Thomson’s position as the widely popular critic of the *New York Herald Tribune* (1937-51) kept him fashionably prominent and was one reason for the frequent performances of his music. His name was on the tip of every musician’s tongue, and one could routinely find a performance of his work throughout the city, and indeed the country. However, after his retirement from the *Herald Tribune* in 1951, his music was performed far less often.

Thomson’s personality has been described by his student, Ned Rorem, as being as “shrewd as they come – about everything but Virgil.”\(^\text{35}\) In this way he took risks with his personal life and openness about his sexual orientation, which may not have always proven to be in his best interest. He appeared gentler, campy, even effeminate as compared to Copland, and had a penchant for referring to himself as “Papa.” In one such anecdote, Rorem recalls Thomson taking a nap after a long afternoon of working, but asking that Rorem wake him at a prescribed time. When Rorem entered the room and woke Thomson, Thomson responded, “That’s no way to wake Papa. Come over and wake Papa with

\(^{34}\) Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 207.

\(^{35}\) Rorem, *Knowing When to Stop*, 208.
a kiss.” Rorem recounts many reports of this type of campy, spontaneous flirting by Thomson with his male students.

Copland, on the other hand was more reserved in his flirtations, typically requiring meetings to be set by colleagues. Many such meetings with Copland were arranged easily, simply by one’s fulfilling the prerequisite of being a young male composer. However, he did become mentor to innumerable heterosexual and homosexual composers American composers alike.

It was widely understood that Copland was particularly interested in a type of relationship with young men he felt was exemplified by the pederasty of Greek culture. He said, “The man who lives the creative life in today’s world is, in spite of himself, a symbolic figure.” Copland took seriously his position as a mentor and felt there were great societal benefits from this type of mentoring and love relationship. He often referred to himself as an “ardent disciple” of André Gide, whose book Corydon explained and defended the “intergenerational erotic and mentoring relationships between men and youths.” Due in part to his

36 Rorem, Knowing When to Stop, 213.

37 Aaron Copland, Copland on Music (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 52.

38 Copland, Copland on Music, 54.

39 Hubbs, 11.
strong belief in this dogma, Copland was typically in the company of young men. Though some of these relationships were non-sexual, the homophilic overtones were well understood.

Copland’s self-esteem though, has been described quite differently from that of Thomson’s. Copland’s acceptance of, and pride in, his orientation caused him act more freely in public and apparently feel less concerned with concealing this facet of his life. His sense of assuredness supported his high-profile career and served to strengthen his position of success, despite historically legitimate concerns associated with openly homosexual affiliations. Copland remarked on the necessity of this sense of complete freedom in the life of an artist:

> Wherever he [the artist] may be or whatever he may say, he is in his own mind the embodiment of the free man. He must feel free in order to function creatively, for only in so far as he functions as he pleases will he create significant work. He must have the right to protest or even to revile his own time if he sees fit to do so, as well as the possibility of sounding its praises. Above all, he must never give up the right to be wrong.  

Copland clearly understood that he needed an unencumbered lifestyle in order to fully self-express and provide leadership and mentorship. He also understood both the positive and negative aspects of living life at that point of American history. He advocated for the right to “protest or even revile” the issues of the day, a point of view very much in keeping

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with the tenets of the homophile movement’s desire for assimilation and integration. He said, “I must create in order to know myself, and since self-knowledge is a never-ending search, each new work is only a part-answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’ and brings with it the need to go on to other and different part-answers. Because of this, each artists’ work is supremely important—at least to himself.”

Given this personal freedom, he was better able to navigate his career path in a socially acceptable manner—even with his rather open romantic partnership with photographer Victor Kraft—keeping him above reproach from those in the mainstream.

Clearly, both Copland and Thomson’s role as the “parents of American music” encompassed far more than mere social encounters. Their influential work spread to their students and onward. The members of their network routinely introduced new colleagues to one another, performed for one another in concerts and showcases, socialized at known homosexual establishments, and “weekended” together in New England, further solidifying this influence.

Without falling prey to the enticing and yet treacherous trap of attempting to identify all those known or probable gay musicians potentially associated with the Copland-Thomson circle, it is helpful to

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follow a few of the intertwined threads which served to support this gay American composer’s network. Some notable members of this group, in addition to the “father and mother” themselves, are Leonard Bernstein, Ned Rorem, David Diamond, Mark Blitzstein, and Paul Bowles. Outside the inner circle, homosexual influences may be attributed to Gertrude Stein, Nadia Boulanger, Samuel Barber, Giancarlo Menotti, John Cage, Henry Cowell, Benjamin Britten, and Francis Poulenc.

Within the social constructs of their chosen family, the progeny did continually turn to Copland and Thomson for both social and musical guidance. The homophile movement itself, as well as these far-reaching connections, inevitably brought a sense of cohesion and support to a group that might otherwise have been marginalized or left individuals to remain secretive.

Tonal Exploration and Compositional Techniques

In considering the influences upon the tonal exploration and compositional techniques that became known as the American—or “Americana”—style, it is important to note the relationships and courses of study of the main participants. Clearly, the creation of any given style is the result of a confluence of earlier stylistic influences, but in looking for a connection to homophilia, it is helpful to first identify more evident
sources. It has been asserted by some musicologists that atonal and dissonant music was perceived as “bold and forward-looking, hence masculine, hence straight; tonal and consonant music was perceived as “gentle and backward-looking, hence feminine, hence gay.” A brief look into these musical connotations and their influences will highlight “the specifically queer lineaments of a musical idiom that serves as one of the most potent and recognizable cultural emblems of Americanness.” It will assist in recognizing the connections made, and that common thread which intertwined them all.

Aaron Copland’s early music, for example, had a strong, modern style somewhat reminiscent of the atonal style used by Schoenberg and early period Stravinsky. It is quite different from what we today commonly attribute to him. An excellent example of this style is his Piano Variations (1930) with its “expressive stringency, textural leanness, and crisp, percussive piano setting.” This style was growing out of favor with the masses and its composers being criticized by music critics and the public for being elitist. It was Copland’s collegial relationship and homo-centric

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42 Hubbs, 176.

43 Hubbs, 10.

friendship with Virgil Thomson which reinforced his consideration of, and ultimately, his composition in a more simplistic and tonal way.

Copland felt that cultural musical idioms were subconsciously suggested to members of society. “To a certain degree, sound images are imposed upon us from without. We are born to certain inherited sounds and tend to take them for granted. Other peoples, however, have an absorbing interest in quite different kinds of auditory materials.” 45 It wasn’t until his 1938 ballet Billy the Kid that audiences would hear the Copland sound that marked the beginning of a new style. This new style became solidified by his rather quick succession of great compositions of similar ilk. The style celebrated the Midwest, open fields, and a resiliency of spirit. In 1942 alone, Copland released Rodeo and Fanfare for the Common Man, while Appalachian Spring with its famous Shaker folk-tune “Simple Gifts,” followed closely in 1944. Recalling the idea of imposed sound images, Copland stated, “Every American boy is fascinated with cowboys and Indians, and I was no exception ... I preferred to imagine being on horse without actually getting on one! In any case, I never gave much thought to ... excluding any kind of influence from a work.”46


Virgil Thomson, “a leading figure in the use of American vernacular materials,” had a compositional technique that had been greatly influenced by the lesbian writer Gertrude Stein. While in Paris, he collaborated with her on two operas: *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928) and *The Mother of Us All* (1947). Stein’s influence on Thomson music primarily came from her practice of writing “portraits,” along with her interests in Dadaism. “The mental process in Dadaism is one of dual control, the analytical intellect supervising the dissolution of the outworn convention while simultaneously the creative intuition reassembles the elements in a new kind of design.”

Stein’s fascination with painting portraiture and close friendship with Pablo Picasso assisted her to identify this portrait style for herself. “Primarily belonging to the world of painting, the ‘attitude’ invaded literature also, and Gertrude Stein’s is one of the writing methods arrived at partly by an application to this form of construction.” In her adaptation of the portrait technique, there would be little preparation, the mechanics would be simple, and it would appear to be automatic writing, simply flowing forth. A significant

47 Morgan, 285.


49 Ibid.
feature of the style appears as repetition, though Stein preferred the concept to be considered “emphasis” or “insistence.”

Stein employed her usual technique throughout her collaboration with Thomson on *Saints* and, “following an epiphany around 1926, Thomson took up ‘the discipline of spontaneity.’” For Thomson, this newly found excitement in the musical version of portraiture caused him to turn from the dissonances of contemporary modern music in order to focus on a more simple tonal language. In this manner, he composed simply, using familiar melodies, and employed a liberal amount of repetition, or insistence, as Stein had suggested. The resulting works occurred as effortless, chordally-based, often arpeggiated melodies that outlined simple intervals of thirds, fourths, fifths and octaves. If not actually drawn from familiar folk tunes and hymns, they were highly reminiscent of such. This simplicity of style later directly impacted Copland’s similar breakthrough.

The “Americana tonality” may be described as having simple, open melodic structure typically constructed of perfect fourths and fifths. Evidence of this “Americana tonality” may be heard in Thomson’s *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938). The melodies often either borrow or mimic folk songs, and are harmonized in a more

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50 Morgan, 286.

51 Hubbs, 12.
open-spaced, tonal manner than the atonal and serial music that had previously been the hallmark of contemporary Western art music. In both of these works Thomson uses folk-like tunes with comparatively simple tonal melodies and harmonies.

In addition to Stein’s important influence, Thomson was also deeply influenced, both musically and socially, by the French composer Erik Satie. Thomson was drawn to Satie’s simple compositional style, and yet noted of his personality that he was an “eccentric, celibate recluse who preferred homo-social artistic circles and published a passionate statement about his friendship with Debussy, yet who vehemently disapproved of open homosexuals.” 52 Thomson goes on to explain Satie’s closeted behavior by suggesting it was a “response to the new injunctions surrounding privacy and sexuality.” 53 He asserts that in an effort to remain comfortably in the mainstream and socially as well as musically accepted, Satie made a concerted point to take a publically opposing view to his own.

It is important to note that both Copland and Thomson studied in Paris in 1921-22 with Nadia Boulanger, considered by some to be “the


53 Thomson, Virgil Thomson by Virgil Thomson, 64.
world’s greatest pedagogue.”54 The sheer number of musicians who flock to her during her lifetime attests to this moniker. Boulanger has since been “outed” as being lesbian by several scholars as well as former students, including Ned Rorem and David Diamond. Her influence on the lives and careers of Copland and Thomson, and therefore their pedagogical and gay social lineage, directly influenced the modern American sound being discussed.

American audiences accepted the shift in compositional style to this noticeably more tonal, folk-inspired sound as a fresh reprieve to the atonal, academic music that was the norm of the time. Other American composers at the time were creating their own musical signatures as well. However, what they created was often quite different from what Thomson and Copland did.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Henry Cowell was pioneering his works featuring atonality, polytonality, and extended techniques for solo piano. Walter Piston, who studied in Paris with Boulanger, briefly overlapping with Thomson and Copland, had an affinity for twelve-tone techniques similar to those of Schoenberg. His Sonata for Flute and Piano highlights these tendencies. The early compositions of Elliott Carter, another important American composer who also studied with Boulanger in the

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54 Rorem, Knowing When to Stop, 90.
1930s, showed a neo-classical, even populist, style. However, Carter quickly moved away to experiment with metric modulation, and other forms of complexity. Charles Ives, though certainly infusing his compositions with the familiar folksongs and hymns of his childhood in Connecticut, did so in relative isolation from the public. He composed works that featured polytonality, polyrhythms, and deep complexity.

Roy Harris (1898-1979) is an important American symphonist who, upon insistence from Copland, traveled to Paris in 1925 to study with Nadia Boulanger. Though examples of Protestant hymnody, jazz influences, and wide spacing are numerous within his works, Harris focused on pre-classical forms as well as Renaissance polyphony. Despite a tepid initial reaction, his Symphony No. 3 (1937-38) that features fugal composition has since been described as the “quintessential American Symphony.”

Certainly, George Gershwin (1898-1937), also a student of Boulanger, is significant in the formation of an American sonority. His early career focused on the composition of popular songs while his later music is known for the fusion of this as well as jazz idioms. Howard Hanson (1896-1981) was a champion of

55 Morgan, 397.

56 Morgan, 138.

American music and director of the Eastman School of Music. However in contrast to the wide-spaced American sonorities that surrounded him musically, he composed in a rather unabashedly Romantic manner.

As already mentioned, the traditional European, modernist music had been dramatically falling out of favor with audiences for some time. After the difficulties of World War I and the Great Depression, people longed for a soothing, inspirational, and nationalistic music that would help them shift their perspective toward a more hopeful time ahead. Still later, “in 1944, with World War II at its grimmest and the world in turmoil, people yearned for the kind of pastoral landscape and innocent love that Martha Graham’s most lyrical ballet offered. Appalachian Spring affirmed traditional values … [and] audiences knew immediately what the country was fighting for.”

Clearly, American music, guided by Thomson and Copland, was on the precipice of a timely and necessary new style.

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CHAPTER 4
COMPARISON OF FLUTE WORKS

It is salient to note that the works chosen herein for comparison—Thomson’s *Sonata for Flute Alone* (1944) and Copland’s *Duo for Flute and Piano* (1971)—were not chosen because the author intimates they are somehow the same, or that one composer merely imitated the other. The fact is these two pieces were composed nearly three decades apart from one another, and are quite different works. However, they are the only works composed by each for solo flute. The Copland *Duo* was an important commission by a group of students of William Kincaid. Many consider it to be a chamber work, as it was conceived as a true duo for flute and piano rather than solo flute with piano accompaniment. It does function, however, as a solo piece for flute. Though flutists may also recognize Copland’s *Vocalise for Flute and Piano* (1974) as a work for solo flute and piano, it is actually an arrangement by the composer of a work from 1929 that was composed for voice. For this reason, the author has not considered it in this comparison.

Between the chosen comparative works, there are interesting corollaries in structure, form and tonal language. Additionally, many of the style tendencies discussed earlier, indeed those put forth by this American Homophilic School, are clearly evident. Both works are
composed in a classical model, three-movement format. A modern synthesis of classical idioms, such as simple ternary, rondo, and song structure may also be seen in the general form of each movement. Both works feature trademark folk-inspired tunes, scalar passages, wide leaps (often to the octave or greater), and a pronounced use of repetition. Finally, the influence of uniquely American idioms such as jazz and blues are evident, particularly within the work by Copland.

Both Thomson and Copland begin their respective first movement with a slow introduction constructed with restrained simplicity and style. Each repetitively highlights the intrinsically stylistic intervals of thirds, fourths, fifths and octaves. Thomson’s treatment is clearly more direct and plain spoken and is arguably far more simplistic in design compared to Copland’s. Nonetheless, similarities between the two works do exist and are indicative to this school of thought.

Thomson focuses his introduction, marked *Adagio*, around the tonal center of G (see Figure 1). In fact, the first ten measures use only this note in varying octaves save for a brief inclusion of a minor third, a perfect fourth, and a perfect fifth, respectively. This represents the pinnacle of simplicity while also showcasing the trademark intervallic relationships that have become so recognized in early twentieth-century American music. As the introduction continues, the spectrum of
intervals narrows to primarily perfect fifths and octaves. The introduction ends with a whole-tone scalar descent to G-flat.

It is interesting to note that Copland chose his introductory section to be unaccompanied. This monophonic treatment renders yet another aspect of similarity between the works and certainly speaks to the school’s concept of simplicity. Copland remarked, “I felt that it was worth the effort to see if I couldn’t say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.”

Copland’s ebb and flow of an upwardly arching melodic line is also indicative of his famous works from the late 1930s and 1940s. In fact, he commented that some of the musical material relates to the lyrical


flute solo that opens his final symphony, Symphony No. 3, from 1946.\textsuperscript{61}

The symphony is known for its distinct American style and famous use of the \textit{Fanfare for the Common Man} theme. Concerning the \textit{Duo} and its pronounced lyrical quality Copland states, “My \textit{Duo} is a lyrical piece, for what can you do with a flute in an extended form that would not emphasize its songful nature?”\textsuperscript{62}

The introduction of the movement, marked “Flowing,” centers around the tonic and dominant pitches of B-flat and F, thus reinforcing the perfect fifth interval (see Figure 2). However, there exists a strong modal (Mixolydian) quality to this solo as most phrases tend toward the resting pitches F and C while B-flat, the apparent tonic, is relegated to weak beats.\textsuperscript{63} Though exceptionally simple in nature, meter changes and the marking “freely, recitative style” do add a fine layer of complexity and interest as compared to Thomson’s extremely pronounced and unwavering duple meter.

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\item[\textsuperscript{62}] Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, \textit{Copland Since 1943}, 376.
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] Perlove, 59.
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Nina Perlove, quoting Copland and biographer Vivian Perlis, suggests that this “unaccompanied solo establishes a pastoral quality because Copland felt that the flute inherently represented ‘outdoor’ music.”\footnote{Perlove, 53.} Perlove continues to say that, “critics have suggested that Copland’s signature intervals and motionless rhythms suggest the open spaciousness and stillness of the prairie.”\footnote{Ibid.} Certainly an observed simplicity of nature and an assured serenity may be experienced from this introductory material. Unlike Thomson, Copland chose to recapitulate this material at the end of the movement, producing a particularly effective balance to the movement as a whole.

Following his introduction, Thomson continues the preferential display of simplicity by constructing the remainder of the movement in

\footnote{Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano* (Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1971), 1.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
simple song form (A-B-A-B). Here the focus is on two melodic themes in compound meter, which are repeated. The first theme is constructed wholly of rapid arpeggios in etude-like fashion while the second theme features a simple folk-dance inspired melody (see Figure 3). The folk dance melody is rather literal in nature and arguably somewhat predictable. The dance is immediately followed by an exact repetition of the first arpeggio theme, save for one added ornament at its inception. This in turn, is followed by a restatement of the folk-dance in the tonic key.

Copland, too, employs the beauty and simplicity of a folk-inspired dance. Marked “much faster (always flowing) with delicacy,” this dance theme is written primarily in triple meter. However, the tendency for

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melodic construction across two bar phrases produces an impression of compound meter (see Figure 4). Once again, Copland uses meter changes within the section to periodically skew the static predictability of the dance. A variant is presented at rehearsal marking 11, again contributing to the overall balance of the movement.

Figure 4: Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, I. Flowing, mm. 25-36

Duo for Flute and Piano by Aaron Copland
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68 Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, 2.
Copland, like Thomson, also uses a section of fast scalar and arpeggiated passages in the center of the movement. This section serves to set the structurally balanced form of the overall movement, a simple rondo.

Examining the second movement of each work draws attention to other notable similarities. Once again, both composers opted for a classic simplicity regarding the overall structure of the movement: a simple ternary (A-B-A) form. Melodic material is derived almost wholly from ascending scale figures. The return of the opening material in both works is unadorned and exact, save for Copland’s use of octave displacement.

Thomson’s opening scalar statement is quickly abandoned in favor of wide octave leaps (see Figure 5). The question posed in the first four measures is answered by the octave motive in mm. 5-8. These octave leaps are reminiscent of those introduced in the opening section of the first movement. The entire A section of this movement is constructed with these two motives.
At first glance, the B section, appears much more complicated with its flourishes of fast arpeggios and scales. However, if one were to strip away all the filigree of the rapid notes, one would clearly recognize that the melodic material here continues with simple ascending scales, much the same as that of the A section. Were one to begin in measure 28 (see Figure 6) by stripping away the filigree, the ascending scale G-A-B-C-D, would emerge quite clearly. This pentascale also highlights the important interval of the perfect fifth. The resolution of this scale, the note D, is the beginning of the next ascent in similar fashion to the note A. This effect becomes even more literal by measure 33. The rapid filigree is itself merely a scale that leads to the melodic notes that remain scalar in motion.

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Neil Butterworth describes the opening, repetitive chords of the piano in Copland’s second movement as representing the tolling of funeral bells. This is certainly an apt description, especially when one considers the composer’s markings of “poetic, somewhat mournful” and directive to the pianist that these chords should be played in a “bell-like” fashion. The eerie simplicity of these tolling bells continues in the piano for eighteen measures, where the first motive of melodic expression is presented in the treble line.

The melodic motive of the A section of this movement is derived primarily of whole-tone scalar passages (see Figure 7). Thomson also used whole-tone scales in his melodic material. However, it is used as transition material from Section A to Section B. Copland’s melody, again

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highlighting a compositional tendency, continually comes to rest at perfect fifths.

Figure 7: Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, II.
Poetic, somewhat mournful, mm. 1-10  
Duo for Flute and Piano by Aaron Copland  
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Copland’s B section is more melodically developed and contrasting than Thomson’s scale flourishes. The section is dramatic and intense, keeping with the composer’s concept of the movement being poetic and mournful. To complete the song form, Copland returns to the A material but adds interest by displacing the flute line an octave higher while lowering the piano treble line by a corresponding octave (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8: Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, II. Poetic, somewhat mournful, mm. 63-67](image)

The final movement of Thomson’s *Sonata* continues with the premise of simplicity. Intervallic leaps highlight an ascending scale G-A-B-C-D followed by an immediate descent to the starting pitch (see Figure 9).

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Once again, not only is the melodic material derived primarily from simple scales, it accentuates the important interval of the perfect fifth. Additionally, Thomson’s considerable use of repetition is extremely evident in this movement. This pattern is repeated three more times before Thomson launches directly into running octave scales in etude-like fashion, as seen in earlier movements.

Figure 9: Virgil Thomson, *Sonata for Flute Alone*, III. Vivace, mm. 1-4

Despite its extremely simple derivation, the movement’s melodic and rhythmic intent rather clearly allude to a folk-inspired dance. The unwavering quadruple meter, with an anacrusis accentuating beats one and three, is relentless throughout the opening theme. It is reminiscent of rhythm patterns common in many folk dances and country clogging.

Copland’s third movement is truly a synthesis of all his previous artistic periods. The movement begins with a dotted rhythm, country

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hoedown-like theme reminiscent of his earliest works of the Americana style such as *Rodeo* or his earlier ballet, *Billy the Kid* (see Figure 10).

This is certainly the style for which Copland is most famous and that which he cultivated through the middle of the twentieth century. Though Thomson had similar sonorities in his works, this is the so-called

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75 Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, 14.
“American” sound that most ingratiated Copland to the American people through the century.

Later, a highly contrasting section of pointillistic writing is introduced. This style has roots in Copland’s earliest, Stravinsky-esque compositions but mutated over time to become indicative of his early Americana style. In fact, Nina Perlove draws attention to this highly pointillist section as being exceptionally reminiscent of the “Gun Battle” scene in *Billy the Kid.* (see Figure 11). It begins with a short, pointed phrase introduced by the flute that is answered similarly by the piano. It continues one after another, shorter and shorter in statement, until both voices seem to battle at the same time. A reprieve finally arrives in the form of the original dotted-rhythm, cowboy-like theme presented in rhythmic unison by both the flute and piano.

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76 Perlove, 68.
Another noticeably important stylistic trait through Copland’s career is represented at rehearsal 2, where a slightly slower tempo clarifies the referenced jazz idiom. Seventh and ninth chords are outlined in a manor that suggests a jazz singer’s scatting technique (see Figure 12). Additional neo-classical influence is evident in the overall structure of the movement, a rondo.

77 Aaron Copland, *Duo for Flute and Piano*, 16.
One may recognize these interesting corollaries between pieces, yet despite similarities, these are two very different works. Thomson’s Sonata is far simpler in design and, arguably, less artfully developed than Copland’s Duo. Interestingly, this opinion regarding the Thomson Sonata

78 Aaron Copland, Duo for Flute and Piano, 15.
has been somewhat widely accepted as critics did not greet the work with great acclaim and to this day, the work remains on the canonical fringe of the flute repertoire.

The comparison of these two works is a fractional representation of the total compositional output of each composer. However, what is most important to glean from this comparison is the similarity and stylistic traits present among these works that are indicative of each composer, as well as the principles fostered in their early twentieth-century American Homophilic School of composition. Thomson’s work was composed amidst the height of the Homophile movement, and showcases the intentional shift in compositional technique that he made just prior to that time. Copland’s work came twenty-seven years later. However, in completing this commissioned work, Copland abandoned his most recent exploit into serialism in favor of that noteworthy Americana style he made famous at the height of both the Homophile movement and his career.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Is it possible that something as seemingly unrelated as sexual orientation could be a significant ingredient in defining a musical style? Ought several individuals’ shared experience of sexual identity be distinguished and recognized today as a clearly defined group in music history? Could such a group germinate a musical style synonymous with nationalistic pride such that its very widespread popularity would necessitate a defining term, “Americana?” This author asserts affirmatively so.

In the early 1930s, the United States’ government began a search for inspirational and nationalistic icons, which would redefine America and take focus away from the collapse of the stock market in 1929 as well as the resulting Great Depression. The European tradition of music was losing audience favor, while purely American musics such as jazz and blues were not yet valued as high artistic art forms. In the words of Charles Ives, “American music had grown too soft and lost its vital ‘manliness.’” Thus, in an attempt to prove America’s growth and value in culture, it became imperative to identify not only a distinct American musical style, but also the composers who would create it. What

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79 Hubbs, 72.
resulted from this determined search was a new style and a nationally recognized music.

For the first part of the century, roughly 1900-25, the development of American art music had not progressed well and an extremely low percentage of music being performed by America’s greatest orchestras was, in fact, American. Attendance at symphony performances was at an all-time low. There was an overwhelming feeling that “the experimental and dissonant modern music of the 1920s and early 1930s had alienated many concertgoers,\textsuperscript{80} while music appreciation in the country’s rural areas relied deeply on traditional folk styles, jazz, swing, and blues. Additionally, cuts in arts funding and education had caused formal music instruction to be unavailable to nearly two-thirds of the country’s children.

Widespread musician unemployment ultimately encouraged the American Federation of Musicians to work closely with Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration to create the Federal Music Project. The Federal Music Project became the central governmental agency charged with causing a musical awakening in the United States. The AFM and Roosevelt administration hoped the Federal Music Project would help Americans listen to, study, compose, and perform serious music more

\textsuperscript{80} Kenneth J. Bindas, \textit{All of This Music Belongs to the Nation} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 62.
than at any other time in the country’s history.”\textsuperscript{81} It was also hoped that its commitment to musical nationalism would be unmistakable. The Federal Music Project administrators worked closely with the Music Teachers’ National Association in making music lessons available to school-aged children. Though instruction wasn’t the primary goal of the organization, it was accepted that musical instruction would ultimately cause the development of a better, well-rounded American citizen. This citizen, it was hoped, would then support the growth of American culture and therefore its nationalistic pride. Guy Maier, assistant to Nikolai Sokoloff and head of the Federal Music Project, exemplified this ideology when he said, “the Federal Music Project’s job was to perform and instruct so that America could discover its national culture.”\textsuperscript{82}

Though the creation of the Federal Music Project was well received by most, there were concerns the agency had to consider. In order to avoid accusations of governmentally controlled art—a fear for those looking to recent examples of Germany and the Soviet Union—the Federal Music Project ultimately agreed not to pay composers for their compositions. Rather, composers were encouraged to submit their compositions, whatever the style or idiom, to an audition board for review. Should the board select the composition, the Federal Music Project would assure

\textsuperscript{81} Bindas, 15.

\textsuperscript{82} Bindas, 16.
that it was publically performed. Additionally, the Federal Music Project’s widespread use of radio, which as of the 1920s was a virtual necessity in a typically American home, necessitated that broadcasts of board-selected music show the agency’s fairness and commitment to each composer’s freedom of expression. This was essential to keeping the agency above reproach. Radio broadcasts also provided a unique opportunity to provide rural areas with high quality classical art music, where producing a live concert was otherwise much more difficult.

From its inception in 1935 through 1939, the Federal Music Project supported over 6,700 new American compositions, which were performed before nearly 150 million people. During this time period wide, and relatively rapid, dissemination of new musical ideas took place. In fact Thomson, a member of the Manhattan gay enclave discussed herein, had music premiered by Federal Music Project orchestras, which included *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938).

The Federal Music Project’s high-profile goal of helping Americans discover a national musical culture reinforced Copland’s feelings that it was his duty to speak for, and to, the American people. “I prefer to think that I write my music from a single vision... because I take into account with each new piece the purpose for which it is intended and the nature

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83 Bindas, 108.
of the musical materials with which I begin to work.” Ultimately, Copland found great public acclaim with his new compositional style represented in *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Quiet City* (1940), *Our Town* (1940), *Rodeo* (1942), *Fanfare for the Common Man* (1942), *Lincoln Portrait* (1942), *Appalachian Spring* (1944), and *The Tender Land* (1954). Truly, the development of American music had found a renewed spirit in the twentieth century, and specifically in Copland.

As evidence has provided, the sexual orientation today known as gay has perpetually existed and is an ineradicable part of the human sexual possibility. It has been recognized, even sought out and revered, by many cultures for centuries. However, along with others, our own western society has not historically embraced homosexuality in a similar manner and has had an unfortunate reactionary history of tremendous oppression and draconian punishment.

Born out of this long-term oppression, a desire for equality and integration emerged. Through this, unique cultural practices and traits developed. People banded together to support one another in their goals, provide assistance to one another, and communicate their desire to be equal among the greater populace. Formal networks and movements

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85 Weeks, 96.
were launched, creating discernable moments in history in this country and abroad.

The homophile movement, though relatively brief in our national history, set a course for homosexual integration, acceptance and equality in mid-twentieth-century America. Arguably, and as is often the case, this was witnessed most prevalently in the artistic community.

Within this document, a case has been presented that outlines the evolution of musicology that ultimately legitimized research and valuable consideration of socio-gender studies as they relate to music. Examples of influential musical schools of thought, and what they offered their immediate societies, have been presented. There has been a brief discussion outlining some of the challenges faced by homosexuals throughout history that led to the development of the homophile movement and in turn, the modern gay rights movement. A discernable shift in compositional style, coinciding with the American desire to produce a new jingoistic music, has been identified particularly in the compositions of Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland. Finally, a brief comparative exploration of each composer’s sole work for solo flute has been conducted which highlights this new compositional style.

It is therefore valuable and necessary, to openly acknowledge the contributions of these influential composers from the perspective of the coinciding homophilic desire for assimilation and contribution to greater
society. Copland remarked, “[The artist’s] importance in society, in the deepest sense, is that the work he does gives substance and meaning to life as we live it ... We as a nation must be able to put down in terms of art what it feels like to be alive now, in our own time, in our own country.”

Certainly, Thomson and Copland’s music is representative of what they felt it was to live in early twentieth-century American society and contribute to a new nationalistic pride in America. Their use of simple folksongs, open harmonies, and widely palatable sonorities that continue to resonate with the American people today, shows not only a new American period in music, but represents the desire to, using their unique musical gifts, be fully integrated into society.

It would appear that an identifiably American sonority, which produces visceral feelings of pride and patriotism for so many Americans, was born of the trials, experiences, and political motivations of some early twentieth-century gay American composers. It is no longer sufficient to speak of Thomson, Copland, and the remarkable body of important American composers that followed in their footsteps without also acknowledging that this group was, interestingly and overwhelmingly, gay.

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Though Aaron Copland is typically noted as being the more important character in this American musical development, one must give appropriate credit to the profound influence Virgil Thomson had on Copland’s compositional style. This shift ultimately led to Copland’s tremendous fame, influence, and a recognized leadership in American composition.

As poignant example, after Thomson’s death Leonard Bernstein was quoted in a *New York Times* article by John Rockwell:

> The death of Virgil T [sic] is a like the death of an American city: it is intolerable. Virgil was loving and harsh, generous and mordant, simple but cynical, son of the hymnal yet highly sophisticated. He will always remain rightly alive in the history of music, if only for the extraordinary influence his witty and simplistic music had on his colleagues, especially Aaron Copland, and through them on most of American music in our century. I know that I am one twig on that tree, and I will always cherish and revere Virgil, the source.  

With this heartfelt acknowledgment, it is obligatory to acknowledge the deeply embedded homophillic influence on America’s twentieth-century music, which did ultimately become the quintessentially acknowledged American sonority, and is often referred to as “Americana.”

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# TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Berdache</td>
<td>Refers to the native-American ideology of a “two-spirited” people, although usually male, who assume the gender identity role and social status of the opposite sex, including the potential marriage bond to another male. Because of derogatory etymology, native-Americans have stood against the widespread use of the term since the late twentieth century.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buggery</td>
<td>Though used in British law and the Buggery Act of 1533, the definition was not specified within the statute. Over the years, judicial precedent has defined the scope of buggery in varying manners. This antiquated British term most generally refers to the act of sodomy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closet (the closet)</td>
<td>A gay vernacular term which refers to hiding one’s sexual orientation from general public knowledge by alluding to one’s life as being shut away from sight, as in “hiding in the closet.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divaspeak</td>
<td>A manner of speaking in which one purposely turns a phrase such that it appears to be the opposite of what is actually so. It may fake humility, condense anger, or make dramatic show of a perceived failure. It may be seen as a language of “vindication and self-defense.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Defined by Merriam-Webster as happily excited; merry; keenly alive and exuberant; having or inducing high spirits, the term came to popularly refer to homosexuals in the twentieth century.</td>
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88 Koestenbaum, 131.
| **Hijra** | Also referred to as the kothi, and referred to in the Karma Sutra, these individuals are a well-defined group who typically live in special communities. They are integral to society and amongst other contributions, perform special blessings at weddings and the births of children. |
| **Outing** | “Coming Out” and its active verb “outing,” refer to a gay person’s act of informing friends and family of his or her sexual orientation in an effort to live openly in society. |
| **Stonewall** | The 27th June, 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay drag bar in New York City’s Greenwich Village, is generally considered the beginning of the 20th-century gay rights movement. Though police raids at gay bars were commonplace, this was the first time in history a large group of homosexuals resisted arrest which began a series of conflicts between homosexuals and New York City Police. |
| **Queer** | A term adopted later in the twentieth century by the homosexual community as self-descriptive. The term traditionally referred to being odd, out-of sorts, or unusual, and developed an oppressive vernacular usage. The gay community moved to embrace the term, along with other words and symbols such as the inverted pink triangle used by the Nazis, in order to reduce the associated stigma and to return the power to the community. |
### Timeline

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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- **(1895)** Oscar Wilde case tried in London
- **American Homophile Movement** *(1924-early 1970s)*
- **(1948 & 1953)** Kinsey Reports on Human Sexuality
- **(1951)** Mattachine Society
- **(1969)** Stonewall Riots
- **Nadia Boulanger** *(1887-1979)*
- **Paris** *(1921 & 1925-40)*
  - **(1928)** *Four Saints in Three Acts*
  - **Herald Tribune** *(1937-51)*
  - **(1936)** *The Plow That Broke the Plains*
  - **(1938)** *The River*
  - **(1942)** Thomson arrested
  - **(1944)** *Sonata for Flute Alone*
  - **(1947)** *The Mother of Us All*
- **Virgil Thomson** *(1896-1989)*
- **Aaron Copland** *(1900-1990)*
  - **Paris** *(1921-24)*
  - **(1938)** *Billy the Kid*
  - **(1942)** *Rodeo and Fanfare for the Common Man*
  - **(1944)** *Appalachian Spring*
  - **(1971)** *Duo for Flute and Piano*
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