



**AARON COPLAND**  
Music for the Theatre; Appalachian Spring Suite (orig. version); Two Ballads for Violin & Piano; Elegies for Violin & Viola; El Salón México (arr. Toscanini)  
Diane Walsh (piano); Eugene Drucker (violin); Lawrence Dutton (viola)  
Harmonie Ensemble, New York  
Steven Richman  
Bridge-9145(CD)  
Reference Recording - Appalachian Spring: This One; Copland (RCA--Orchestral Version)

*Artistic Quality* **40/40** *Sound Quality*

What a delightful, refreshing release! For decades Bridge has consistently released superbly engineered recordings of adventurous and enterprisingly chosen repertoire, performed to the highest artistic standards. Indeed, it would be hard to find any other label that does so much for so many contemporary performers and composers who otherwise might never enjoy the chance to reach the record buying public. Even on those occasions that the label ventures into the more popular standard classics, you can almost invariably count on finding some fresh new twist that gives the disc unusual interest. Here's a case in point. Who knew that none other than Arturo Toscanini made a piano-solo arrangement of El Salón México? If that's not a novelty, then what is?

And did anyone suspect at this late date that there was any music by Copland, however slight, that remained to be unearthed and recorded? Sure, Two Ballads for Violin and Piano (all that exists of a projected violin concerto for Isaac Stern) and Elegies for Violin and Viola (some of which became Statements for Orchestra) aren't major compositions, though this latter work remains a worthy exemplar of a seldom-exploited medium; but taken together with the Toscanini transcription, what we have here is certainly more than "just another Copland" disc, and everything is marvelously performed by pianist Diane Walsh and the two members of the Emerson String Quartet.

Besides, the major works are simply sensational. This recording goes straight to the top of the list for performances of the Appalachian Spring Suite in its original chamber scoring. Conductor Steven Richman's crisp, sprightly tempos in the quicker sections and his perfectly flowing, never-too-sentimental approach to the slow bits wake this music up like a brisk spring shower. No matter how well you know it, this version has the piece sounding like new. Music for the Theatre overflows with sassy, jazzy verve, the ironic wit of the Burlesque is strikingly caught and the Stravinskian snap to the music's rhythms is confident and secure. Through it all the Harmonie Ensemble plays as if it owns the music, and the sonics are simply the last word in naturalism and clarity. Fantastic. [5/12/2004]

--David Hurwitz