

Queer lives in American music: Bernstein, Blitzstein, and Copland

by

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Abstract

In the last half century, there has been an increase in gender studies within the realm of musicology. Thus far, most of the research that has been conducted centers on how composers' queerness is manifested in their music. The works of notable composers such as Peter Tchaikovsky, Aaron Copland, Benjamin Britten, and Francis Poulenc have been analyzed thoroughly. It is inherent that these composers' musical language is varied, and thus the musical manifestation of their queerness is varied. Studies on the impact of LGBTQIA+ culture (or lack thereof) on queer composers' lives is limited. This research serves as an examination of the intersectionality of select queer American composers within the early to middle twentieth century.

This study is a focus on the lives of composers Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, and Leonard Bernstein through the lens of the queer culture of their time. This research serves to illuminate these composers' lives in a way that has not been previously emphasized. The purpose of this research is to explore the lives of three queer American composers and how they were impacted by queer culture of their time.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to two people. The first, Luca de la Florin, has taught me not only how to be a great musician, but also how to be proud of being a queer individual. The second, Dr. Brent Smith, is to thank for much of my personal and life philosophies.

Chapter 1 - A Cultural Introduction into the Homosexual World

Social and musical change permeated every facet of the twentieth century. Cultures and philosophies often converged in meaningful ways in pockets across the globe. These ideologies often allowed thinkers and musicians to compose and share thoughts and music that might otherwise be ostracized for their progressive and unique musical insights. One emergent topic in musicology is that of gay and bisexual male composers and how societal unrest impacted their prominence in the musical scene of their time. Out of necessity, they would secretly share their ideas, emotions, and messages within their music using many clever musical devices without alerting the general public of their queerness.

While rapid change and growth remained emblematic of the twentieth century, one cannot examine this time and not naturally be led to America, specifically New York City. It became a magnet for diverse populations of people during tumultuous world events of WWI. The turn of the 20th century also marked the first time that major conductors and other musicians moved to America in large numbers. The growth of New York City led to newly established subcultures and underground scenes. Rising movements included prohibition, the feminist movement, and the gay scene.

When it comes to gay culture, subcultures emerged in many parts of the world. There are three cities where queer people were gathering in large numbers, enough so to make an observable community: Paris, Berlin, and New York City. This report will include an exploration of groups in all three aforementioned cities, with New York and its impact on composers as the location of focus. The reader will observe that many similarities exist between the cultures established in each of these cities. The purpose of this study is to identify and discuss how

composers were influenced by New York City's (and more generally America's) queer culture on American composers.

Given the influence of NYC queer culture, one should consider the impact it had in all areas, including music performance and composition. Numerous composers could fit into the category of gay/bisexual in the early twentieth century; however, some gained particular attention in the queer community as well as the musical world. Many of these composers were within the same cohort, with some being founded based on romantic relationships. In these romantic circles these composers influenced each other musically and otherwise, making it difficult to discern the origins of many new ideologies that are attributed to these composers.

Before looking at individual composers, it is imperative to look at the culture, queer and otherwise, in which they were raised. As culture changed, so did the views of composers, thus influencing their compositional style. A great example of this is Aaron Copland. He is possibly the most notable gay composer of the twentieth century. He is also considered one of the greatest American composers because of his compositional output and influence. His works are often associated with iconic American ideals including freedom, Western expansion, the wilderness, and vast, untamed land ripe with potential. He is the first to become widely known for writing in an American nationalistic style. Another facet of Copland's contribution to American music, is his mentorship of American composers such as Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, and Gian Carlo Menotti. Remaining close friends, these men often confided in each other on an array of topics. Secrets shared within this cohort included their sexuality.¹ Copland, being the first "openly" gay composer, counseled other bisexual and gay composers in America. He referred to himself as a bachelor, stating he "was in the tradition of Beethoven and Brahms, I have no theory

¹ Howard Pollack, "The Dean of Gay American Composers," *American Music* 18, No. 1 (2000): 39-49.

as to why.”² The following paragraphs will reveal a framework to support how Copland acted as a mentor to these composers informed by his upbringing and weaving personal experiences into his compositional style. It will also serve as an introduction to other composers’ cultural backgrounds.

Culture

Understanding both the general culture and queer culture of the time is critical in examining the plethora of factors that influenced Copland and his contemporaries personally and musically. During the turn of the twentieth century, there were radical cultural shifts in New York City, and subsequently the United States, due to narratives being introduced in the political, medical, and educational fields. Factoring in their influence, it is best to see what the world was like before these narratives shifted the culture in New York City.

The queer culture in New York City prior to and during the opening decades of the twentieth century was completely different than queer culture of the present day. To clearly connect the vernacular terms of the early twentieth century with current understanding, several terms will be operationally identified to add clarity and focus to the following discussions. Each of the terms are presented in chronological order of appearance within society to establish the foundation for the thesis of the current study while also providing context for understanding the impact of dictions made across all time periods. As a reader, please note that most of these terms are now considered slurs used against queer people; however, their etymology did not gain negative connotations or offensiveness, nor were they used as slurs until recently. There are also

² Howard Pollack. *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1999), 237.

some terminologies that were considered harmful previously, but presently are used freely in vernacular speech.

Terminologies

The ever-changing queer culture is best examined through the communication in the culture itself. The following paragraphs discuss how *fairies* shaped queer culture because, generally, they were the public face of gay/bisexual men. With sociological and historical context provided, both gay and bisexual men have significance in the shape of queer culture.

The first and probably most influential term used for homosexuals in nineteenth into the early twentieth century is *fairy*. Other terms that had the same vernacular connotation were *fag* or *faggot*, *she-man*, *nance*, or *sissy*. *Fairy* was used more often on the street and amongst the queer community. Males who were deemed effeminate in nature were considered *fairies*. These men dressed in flamboyant attire and were the most public about their sexual nature. An important aspect about the nature of these so-called *fairies* must be addressed. During this time, there was no such concept of homosexuality and heterosexuality. As Chauncey states in his book *Gay New York*:

It is almost impossible today to think about sexuality without imagining that it is organized along an axis of homosexuality and heterosexuality; a person is either one or another, or possibly both--but even the third category of 'bisexuality' depends for its meaning on its intermediate position of the axis defined by those two poles. The belief that one's sexuality is centrally defined by one's homosexuality or heterosexuality is hegemonic in contemporary culture: it is so fundamental to the way people think about the world that it is taken for granted, assumed to be natural and timeless, and needs no defense.³

The definition of sexuality and gender remained interchangeable during the early twentieth century. The general use of both terms supported the notion that they held the same meaning.

³ George Chauncey, *The Gay New York* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 13.

With this in mind, it is best to examine some significant historical features of the word *fairy*, as it emphasizes how interchangeable sexuality and gender are in this time period.

Because of the deep tie between sexuality and gender, this led *fairies* to be associated with women. It is important to note fairies are viewed as women for two distinct reasons: first, they naturally would congregate with female prostitutes. The second reason, and the more important in the societal view, was that in coitus they would assume the “female role.” This role would become the point of controversy throughout the early twentieth century.

The term *fairy* would take on more significance into the early twentieth century. It became a controversial archetype for gay men. In the medical field, a new term, *invert*, became synonymous with *fairy*. In explaining the term *invert*, at the time it was assumed that a man should naturally want to take the “man’s role” in intercourse. It was deemed unnatural for men to want to do the opposite, thus making it the inverse or *invert*. This term was primarily used in courts of law and in prisons.

The next vernacular term used for homosexuals of the late 1800s to the early 1900s is *queer*. This term served the same street connotation as *fairy* until the 1910s and 20s. *Queer* began to take a different connotation in the 1910s in the queer community. People who identified as *queer* during this shift self-identified as a “normal” man or masculine presenting. During this time, the white middle class was trying to separate themselves from *fairies*. This is due to a social movement of masculinity. The feminism movement had threatened the working class because women were taking jobs of the working man. This social divide forced homosexual men to look at if they personally defined themselves with the feminine presenting *fairy* or the “normal” masculine presenting man.

Last, the term *trade* is the most socially interesting of the three groupings. *Trade* referred to a man who would engage in sexual relations with other men, but retain his masculine position in society. Before the 1920s, these men were not considered “gay.” Again, because gender role was considered the same as sexuality, if a man was taking “the man’s role” in intercourse, he would retain his masculinity. There is an example from *The Gay New York* that discusses a man who would “take the woman’s role” in intercourse but would keep up his masculine role in society by actively going to the gym with men and talking about women.⁴ It was imperative for a man who was considered masculine in this era to keep up his socially viewed masculinity.

While this is not the entire collection of vernacular terms used for gay men of the time, these are the terms that one should know before beginning to analyze the gay/bisexual man in the early twentieth century. Other terms will be examined as needed, and their importance will be discussed in later chapters.

Classes Within Gay Culture

It is important to note the frequency of these sexual relations amongst economic and social classes, as it will be important in analyzing the change in gay culture. The lower, or working class, were the most frequent economic demographic to engage with men. The middle class were second, with a divide amongst between status of jobs. The higher status of job in the middle class, the less likely the individual was to have sexual relations with another man. The higher class, of which had very high influence in society like college professors, were the least likely.

⁴ Ibid., 81.

Around the year 1920 was when gay culture shifted. With the movement in feminism posing a direct threat to the lower class, of which was the most frequent in men to have sexual interactions with both men and women, there was a need for the differentiation of sexual role and gender. During the early 1920s it was imperative for men to keep their masculinity in order to maintain social relevance and rank in a social circle. It is at this time during the 1920s that a person's sexuality began to be viewed as distinct and different from their gender role. Generally, middle-class men considered heterosexuality and their demonstrated exclusivity for relationships with women as a definitive and peak culmination for their masculinity. In middle-class men, many self-titled queer men would maintain a socially masculine aura but would have sexual relations with men and women, or just men. Queer men focused on how they presented themselves and not on sexual relations to determine the masculinity in societal rank. Because of this, queer men opposed the feminine-presenting man, or fairy. They considered fairies to be a detriment to their place in society. The average citizen grouped fairies and queer men as the same, which was damaging to the queer man.

In summary, when examining the gay culture in the early twentieth century, it is harmful to assume all modern terminology applies as it would now to culture of the past. Discussing whether a composer was "gay" is not an accurate or complete assessment of how the composer and how culture of the time impacted public perception of the composer and their works. As we examine the impact that gay culture had on gay composers, we will discuss changes in the culture from the early to mid-twentieth century. These changes were not stark changes: they were very subtle transitions that took years, sometimes decades to completely shift.

Starting with the beginning of urban gay culture in the early twentieth century, and the very close relation between sexuality and gender roles, this deep tie was seen in music during

this era. Fairies were viewed as the epitome of being gay, and thus “feminine” jobs for men naturally led people to assume their sexuality. Music has been considered more of an effeminate profession because of the emotional nature of music. During the shift of the twentieth century, when masculinity was socially perceived more than in times before, musicians were at risk of being accused of being a fairy. Philip Brett addresses this in *Queering the Pitch*. He states that “The lethal combination (of misogyny and sexuality being closely tied) in turn helps to augment the legendary misogyny of the profession, in which homosexual musicians like Aaron Copland have been especially implicated.”⁵ To be confirmed a gay would be detrimental for a composer’s career.

The increase of charges of sodomy against men, or as it was deemed “the crime against nature,” increased drastically from 1880 to the 1920s. In the 1890s an average of 14 to 38 men were arrested annually, whereas in the 1920s the range was from 75 to 125 in New York City.⁶ The main factor of the increase of accusations was caused by societal purity activist groups that wanted to rid New York City of prostitution, sodomy, and other “societal impurities.” The anonymity of gay men to become more and more crucial. There were accounts of newspapers “outing” gay men, publicly insinuating that they were living with another man, or frequenting a hotel with a man. Thus, gay men learned how to communicate more effectively and secretly without raising suspicion from the public.

Gay men would communicate in a very coded way, often called *camp*. This is how most gay men would communicate without alerting the general public of their sexuality. Composers

⁵ Philip Brett, “Eros and Orientalism in Britten’s Operas,” in *Queering the Pitch* 2nd edition, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

⁶ Chauncey, *The Gay New York*, 141.

used *camp* to hide underlying messages within their music. Even though the culture a composer lives in affects their music, one might think it to be nearly impossible to closely pinpoint the exact compositional choices and tie them to their homosexuality. However, with *camp* we can find more obvious examples of queer composers putting subliminal messages in their compositions.

Camp and Communication

Camp, while difficult to comprehensively define, refers to a style, specific mannerisms, and double entendre. The origins of *camp* came from the need for gay men to switch from homosexual to heterosexual mannerisms while at work, in public, or sometimes even at home. These coded words and style of dress enabled homosexual individuals to quickly identify each other while putting on a heterosexual persona. An example of this would be to wear a certain color of tie.⁷ The degree of the coyness would primarily depend on how comfortable the person would be exhibiting their homosexuality with *camp*.

When communicating in *camp*, they would often talk about switching personas as “letting your hair down” or “keeping your hair up.”⁸ If a man was trying to determine if someone was homosexual, he would be “dropping bobby pins.” This is merely one of the many terms used in camp. The overall purpose of *camp* was to mock the traditions of the heteronormative world, while not alerting anyone of the condescension. While reviewing the past, this is one of the easiest ways to examine the hidden messages that gay composers would put in their music. Just

⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁸ Ibid., 289.

like gay culture, *camp* evolved as time progressed and as many heterosexuals would become aware of their code.

Camp was a compositional tool gay composers would utilize to allude a sexual undertone while keeping their sexuality hidden. The composer Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) is attributed to using this method the most. Poulenc's *camp* is using unexpected dissonant chords in an otherwise very consonant piece. Previous scholars have alluded to the different factors that would affect a gay composer's approach to the display of their sexuality in their music. Nadine Hubbs in her book *The Queer Composition in America's Sound* states that class, race, and gender presentation all played a factor in how composers interacted with gay culture at the time.⁹

The purpose of this study is to present theories for how and why gay composers of different generations, scholarly backgrounds, religious backgrounds, and economic classes would display their sexuality in their music. Previous scholars have noted that it is nearly impossible, or even too abstract, to pinpoint the aspects of composers' music that are solely a manifestation of their sexuality. However, there are ways to isolate these factors such as sexuality.¹⁰ For instance, both Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson were in similar economic classes, yet their music is vastly different, as is the way they portrayed their sexuality.

The following chapters will discuss the cultural, economic, and geographical factors in detail, and how they might have influenced each composer's portrayal of themselves in their music. There will also be a comparison to other gay composers to isolate individualistic factors for each composer.

⁹ Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press: 2004), 67-68.

¹⁰ Lawrence D. Mass, "A Conversation with Ned Rorem" in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, 2nd Edition, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: 2006), 87.

Chapter 2 - Aaron Copland's Queer Evolution

Upon examining American music history, many acknowledge Aaron Copland as a founder of the American nationalist style. His music is considered quintessentially American, in that it captures an American narrative of open plains, wilderness, and unlimited possibility. His compositions *Rodeo* and *Appalachian Spring* are considered by many to be two of his greatest works and show this Americana spirit. While the music of Copland is considered today as a great example of patriotism, some aspects of his life were purposefully hidden from the public during his lifetime. Copland was raised in a Jewish household and was religious in his youth, but never practiced as he grew older. He was also a gay man. Throughout his life, he associated himself with other gay composers, to whom he would become a mentor. Some, but not all, of these mentorships were also sexual in nature.

These facts were omitted from many recordings, biographies, and other media for most of the twentieth century. Very little was written about the true, hidden character of Copland until recently, most notably Howard Pollack's biography of Copland.¹¹ Throughout Copland's life, being Jewish and gay were viewed as undesirable, the latter being illegal for a long period of his life. He, like many others, had to hide these facts and show them privately. Gay individuals formed circles of close friends in which they would confide. Copland did this with other predominant composers.¹²

While some research exists regarding works of Copland and their homosexual undertones, this chapter will serve as a more complete view of Copland's interaction with queer culture, specifically the influences on him and later the influence he had on other queer

¹¹ Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound*, 1-2.

¹² Philip Brett, "Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas," 237.

composers. This will be a study of how Copland's view of sexuality affected other gay composers. Copland became an influential figure to others, being considered the "dean" of gay composers.¹³

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) lived through one of the most volatile times for queer people in the United States of America. He saw change from an underground society, where cruising (actively searching for intercourse in cities) was the primary way that gay men met and where gay men could be "out of the closet" within society.¹⁴ Copland was also one of the first composers who acknowledged his sexuality, along with a few composers like Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920) and Virgil Thomson (1896-1989). Copland, unlike other early queer composers, began to make a circle of other close queer friends. He also joined social circles of gay artists, poets, and authors.¹⁵

Aaron Copland was born in Brooklyn, New York in an Orthodox Jewish family that immigrated from Russia. In Copland's youth, the gay culture that influenced him began to become apparent. Copland's family was part of a surge of immigrants moving to New York. In the 1890s, as George Chauncy states, "The majority of people immigrating to New York, in particular were from Italy or Russia (the latter primarily Russian Jews)".¹⁶ These immigrants were mainly bachelors, which increased the rate of sodomy.¹⁷ Copland undoubtedly would have interacted with this bachelor scene in his youth. One such instance was with his father, going to a bathhouse.

¹³ Pollack, "Dean of Gay Composers," 49-59.

¹⁴ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 67-68.

¹⁵ Philip Brett, "Eros and Orientalism in Britten's Operas," 237.

¹⁶ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 137

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

Bathhouses were very popular cruising scenes for gay men in the early 1900s. They were discreet places where men could gain the attention of others while in the nude, without raising suspicions. When Copland and his father went together to a bathhouse, they coincidentally went to one of the most popular cruising bathhouses in New York: Lafayette Bathhouse.¹⁸ There is quite an interesting connection between composers and this particular bathhouse: Charles Griffes was a regular there until police raids grew in frequency. George and Ira Gershwin also managed this bathhouse starting December 1916.¹⁹ George was 18 and Ira was 20 at the time.

Copland's family lived at 628 Washington Avenue in Brooklyn.²⁰ This was very close to many gay centers: just across the East River in New York is Greenwich Village. In the 1910s there was a street song that had the line "Fairylane's not far from Washington Square," referencing Greenwich Village.²¹ 42nd Street in Manhattan, only a few blocks from where Copland lived, was a major cruising scene for gay men. Gay men found on 42nd street were considered the most flamboyant and were considered "fairies."²² In essence, Copland was surrounded by homosexual activity. In Copland's autobiography, he mentions a great uncle, Nathan Copland, who "never married." This is a common way in academic writing, especially before the 1990s, to state someone's homosexuality.²³ Little is known about Nathan Copland, but he was important enough to be mentioned in Copland's own biography.

¹⁸ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 217-225.

¹⁹ Ibid., 221.

²⁰ U. S. Census Bureau; National Archives

²¹ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 227.

²² Ibid., 68.

²³ Aaron Copland and Vivan Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1984), 16.

Musically, Copland looked to progressive American composers in his youth.²⁴ Griffes was living in Brooklyn during the same time as Copland. Copland regarded him as ahead of his time and stated, “No one can say how far Griffes might have developed if his career had not been cut short by his death.”²⁵ It is unknown if Griffes and Copland ever met.

When Copland was in grade school, he felt very different from other boys and would have to stay out of trouble due to his stature.²⁶ Copland would often be harassed for being more sensitive than his male peers. This is not the only occurrence of musicians being linked to effeminate personality traits. Musicality during this time was considered to come from the internal muse within a man.²⁷ This muse was considered feminine, thus making musicians more feminine than masculine. Copland was associated with femininity many times throughout his life. Copland himself later aligned with this stereotype.²⁸

Aaron Copland and Aaron Schaffer

Aaron Schaffer was one of the first lifelong friends Copland mentioned in his autobiography, they met while on summer vacation in 1916. Schaffer was a graduate student when Copland was in high school. Together they discussed music and French literature, which was Schaffer’s graduate school emphasis. This possibly is Copland’s first romantic relationship. While biography author Pollack has stated that Copland never had any sexual experiences that

²⁴ Mark DeVoto, “Copland and the ‘Boulangerie’,” in *Copland Connotations*, ed. Peter Dickinson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press: 2002), 3-4.

²⁵ Aaron Copland, *Music and Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 102.

²⁶ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 24.

²⁷ Elizabeth Wood, “Sapphonics” in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology 2nd Edition*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2006), 22.

²⁸ Paul Anderson, “To Become as Human as Possible” in *Aaron Copland and His World*, ed. Carol J. Oja, and Judith Tick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 71.

we know of with his friends, it is important to note after examining homosexual relationships among young men of the time, there are some discrepancies with this statement.²⁹

During Copland's youth, a homosexual relationship among musicians often consisted of a looser connection romantically, and not such strongly prevalent gender roles. It was more of a power dynamic often dictated by age.³⁰ This relationship was very temporary. This could possibly be the dynamic Copland patterned his later relationships after. Another account of gay experiences (particularly in Manhattan where Copland resided) that are not usually documented is recorded by Otis Bigelow. He recalls that by the age of twelve he was having sexual relations with his classmates, but they did not think of this as being "gay." He states that it did not exist in his time, which was the thirties.³¹

Another aspect of their relationship which has not been analyzed fully in a queer context are Schaffer's poems that Copland set to music. Aaron Schaffer wrote three poems titled "Night," "A Summer Vacation," and "My Heart is in the East." Of the three, "A Summer Vacation" shows us the most possible subliminal messaging.

"A Summer Vacation" very likely refers to the summer vacation where Copland and Schaffer first met in 1916. It is a very pastoral setting, in which Copland encapsulates the carefreeness of summer.³² The first two lines talk about the joy of this pastorate setting "Days of joy, how have ye fled? Joy immortal are ye dead?" Noticeable emphasis is put on the two lines "Is there nothing that can hold you? Can my arms not enfold you?" While within the poem's

²⁹ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 24.

³⁰ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 88.

³¹ Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company: 1997), 5.

³² Gail Morfesis, "Text and Tune: Compositional Choices in the solo songs of Aaron Copland" (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Kentucky, 2002), 63.

context, these lines are merely trying to keep the joy of summer. However, on the lyric “Is there nothing that can hold you,” there is no piano accompaniment until the word “you” is sung. This is of particular importance because immediately after, during the lyrics “can my arms not enfold you” the music grows to a climax on the words “enfold you.” While one can argue that this is merely excellent presentation of word painting, the falls within the piano immediately thereafter have a certain French impressionistic flair. This could be a musical depiction of Copland reminiscing about his relationship with Schaffer.

Within the song “Night” are some examples of homoerotic lyrics. At the superficial level, this song speaks of the dichotomy of business and the lackluster quality of the night. Upon further review, it tells another story. The opening line, “My heart is as placid as a lake” sets the stage for direct symbolism throughout the song. As the song progresses, this parallel of the lake and heart continues. “It thrills and starts while mankind sleeps, The gentle murmur of the lake is silvered by a fountain’s play.” Musically, there is a sharp exclamation on the word “thrills.” This growth of eroticism is not focused toward a specific individual or thing, which is stylistic of Copland’s early songs.³³ At the most excitable moment of “Night” the lyrics that are sung are “A night bird sings its tuneful lay full of night’s vast joy and ache.” Through this symbolism, we can deduce that the person in question finds his emotions within the night. We can also observe that the geographic location is vague. The song only mentions a lake, trees, and a fountain.

This geographical description and symbolistic writing align with a gay trope within the same time frame this song was composed. Within the 1910s and 20s, gay men would often cruise

³³ David Metzger, “‘Spurned Love’: Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland,” *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 4 (1997): 420.

in public parks at night, where parks served a balance of private and public.³⁴ The unsupervised woods gave men who were cruising some privacy. With these things in consideration, the connotation of “Night” changes, taking on homoerotic undertones. It is possible that Schaffer wrote this poem, and these are mere coincidences, but Copland’s music brings out the homoerotic undertones. It also can be said that Schaffer never meant to imply gay undertones when writing about parks within large cities. Lafayette Square in Washington was an example of one such park during this time.³⁵ If these lyrics did not apply to the city, they certainly would apply to the summer vista where he and Copland spent time together. Either way, the undertones remain a part of the music.

The final song in the collection is called “My Heart Lies in the East.” Howard Pollack states that Schaffer was a Zionist and that this song influenced Copland to be more connected with his Jewish roots. The lyrics are mainly about oppression within the Jewish community and their homeland being overtaken. Oppression was happening to gay people at the time too. While this song has the loosest connection, there are some valid points to be made. The title “My Heart Lies in the East” is the common point between the Jewish and homosexual experience of Copland. Copland and Schaffer’s relationship was very deep. Schaffer suggested that they move to Palestine together.³⁶ Another correspondence of the same magnitude is accounted in Copland’s biography. Schaffer wrote to Copland after moving to France, stating, “If only you could come to Paris with me.... Wouldn’t we be two happy Bohemians”.³⁷ Even though one

³⁴ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 180-184.

³⁵ Eric Cervini, *The Deviant’s War: The Homosexual Versus the United States of America* (New York: Picador, 2020), 20.

³⁶ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 37.

³⁷ Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, 35.

might see these correspondences as merely dear friendship, homosexual relationships revealed themselves in similar ways.

Due to the growing population of big cities like New York City and Chicago, same gendered organizations began to flourish. Within these communities, there were deep friendships. Michael Bronski discusses how due to these organizations (all male sports, the YMCA, clubs, and bars), there could be a male intimacy that was not usually allowed in heterosexual culture.³⁸

At this point, one might be skeptical of the analysis of these songs and theories surrounding their homosexual implications. However, an analysis of the next few songs that Copland composed provides evidence for revealing secret love affairs through his music.³⁹ Copland used the characteristics of gender ambiguity, private and public spaces, and other idioms to portray eroticism. These were common tropes within the gay community in the early twentieth century. Comparing these works to the ones discussed earlier, we can find commonality between the themes of Schaffer, Copland, and the gay culture.

Copland's "Old Poem" and "Night" express geographical ambiguity of the private and public. They also take place during the twilight hours. In "Old Poem," the dichotomy of expressing sorrow within the privacy of an apartment and the public which the character cannot show his sorrow is expressed.⁴⁰ In gay culture, especially that of middle-class men, there was a duality of being openly gay versus not outing one's self to the general public through dress and speech.⁴¹ Furthermore, when comparing "Poet's Song" and "A Summer Vacation" both exude

³⁸ Micheal Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 111-112.

³⁹ David Metzger, "'Spurned Love': Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland," 417-443.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 417-443.

⁴¹ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 106-107.

melancholy with similar themes of separation. These were common emotions amongst gay men who wanted partners.

After reviewing recurring hidden themes in Copland's writing, a compelling argument for a relationship between him and Schaffer is apparent. Whether Copland and Schaffer's relationship was or was not sexual, Copland at the very least had suppressed sexual feelings for Schaffer, and at the most, they were romantically involved.

Copland and the French Influence

While in Paris from 1921 to 1924, Copland studied composition with Nadia Boulanger and developed his musical identity. He also learned more about his own homosexual identity there. This was the most influential time for Copland in that regard. While staying in Paris, Copland lived with his roommate Harold Clurman, who soon would become one of his best friends. While one might speculate that Clurman and Copland could have had a romantic relationship, no evidence exists of such a relationship outside of their platonic friendship. In Harold's journal he describes Copland as very productive. They shared everything together, and thus did not need to speak much to anyone else.⁴² Copland even shared his sexuality with Clurman, to which Clurman recognized.⁴³ This allowed Copland to truly be himself and to define who he wanted to become.

Clurman noted upon meeting Copland for the first time that he was wise beyond his years. He later reflected on this saying, "The secret or source of his wisdom can be traced to his utter acceptance of himself at an early age." He then alludes that Copland dealt with his

⁴² Copland and Perlis, *Copland: 1900 Through 1942*, 57.

⁴³ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 50.

homosexuality primarily before coming to France, specifically in the year 1920.⁴⁴ This is a particularly interesting year because it was at the time when Copland was isolated from Schaffer the longest. While they were still writing to each other, this physical distance could have caused Copland to feel isolated and thus reflect upon his relationship with his sexuality. He apparently overcame this before arriving in Paris, according to Clurman's observation.

French culture of the time experienced a great philosophical uprising in the 1920s. With the prestigious school École Normale Supérieure teaching some of the best philosophers of the 20th century, along with prevalent American authors coming to Paris, it was a great time for thinkers and artists. With this societal growth was a new movement of homosexuality. In France, homosexuality (called pederasty) was common, even while illegal. An account of the early 1900s Paris, states that there were several classes of pederasts. Michael Wilson accounts the observations of social commentator of the time:

Coffignon divided each of the two primary classes of pederasts into three subdivisions: active pederasts were either amateurs, older, more established men living a double life; *entreteneurs*, the "hardened" pederasts for whom the dangers of this life were part of its appeal; or *souteneurs*, habitual offenders who had acquired the taste for pederasty in prison. Passive pederasts were divided into *petit-je sus*, adolescents or young men who have been introduced into prostitution; or the *je sus*, prostitutes or kept boys in their 20s.⁴⁵

A popular place where these men as well as workers, professionals, artists, indigents, political radicals, and hustlers met was in the sub-city of Paris, Montparnasse.⁴⁶ Most scholars and artists

⁴⁴ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁵ Michael L. Wilson, "Drames d'amour des p(ed)é'astes: Male Same-Sex Sexuality in *Belle Epoque Print Culture*" in *Homosexuality in French History and Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Merrick, Michael Sibal (New York: Routledge, 2001), 191.

⁴⁶ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 51.

fell under the category of *amateurs*. One such scholar, a philosopher, is Andre Gide. He published one of the first cases for homosexuality called *Corydon*.

Copland's roommate and friend, Harold Clurman, was studying literature while in Paris. In a letter from Copland to Boulanger he calls Clurman and himself "ardent disciple(s)" of Gide. Copland over his lifetime collected more than thirty publications of Gide. To understand how Gide affected Copland, one must examine Gide's personal philosophies. Gide was an autobiographical writer. In his publications he left an analysis of himself to be examined by the reader.⁴⁷ Gide was a firm believer of personal experience, so when he realized that he was homosexual, he never tried to change that aspect of himself. Neither did Copland. While Copland's view of homosexuality changed over his life, he never tried to be romantic with the opposite gender. Gide's third novel, *Chaque homme porte la forme entière de l' humaine condition*, Gide explores homosexuality from a religious standpoint. He states that homosexuality is a state of a person and cannot be changed.⁴⁸ While Gide was Protestant and Copland Jewish, Copland surely could have related with feeling "born into his sexuality," especially when in religious scenes that fostered a lack of acceptance for this human condition. This idea of sexuality being a part of your identity, and not a conditional state, was defended in Gide's works.

One aspect that both Gide and Copland believed was contrary to the homosexual norm was that neither one of them participated in "camp behavior." With Gide, this might be surprising to some because of his close affiliation with the author Oscar Wilde, who was known

⁴⁷ Wallace Fowlie, "Sexuality in Gide's Self-Portrait," in *Homosexualities and French Culture: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts*, ed. George Stambolian, Elaine Marks (London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 245.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

for his camp behavior and dress.⁴⁹ Moreover, Copland and Gide never tried to find one persona or “type” of man to pursue. To the homosexual community of the time, the sense of community and similarity was vital to finding a partner. Since Copland followed Gide’s pattern of following the traditional norm, as far as appearances go, he was able to pursue whomever he desired.⁵⁰ In *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick states how this concealment allows a differentiation between identity and desire.⁵¹ There were consequences to the personal concealment described. For example, Gide often found his life in a constant wander, looking for a home.⁵² In Copland’s case, he just never settled on a life partner. However, Copland preferred it this way, stating that “Those who differ from me most, attract me most.”⁵³

This ideology did not overtly transfer to all musical contexts. Copland did not use such outwardly “camp” compositional techniques in his compositions while in France. Francis Poulenc and other queer composers at this time were known for their “campy” compositional stylizations. Nadine Hubbs states that during this time French music was related to historically traditional styles of tonality (especially within the Copland-Thomson circle) and atonality being synonymous with the German compositional style, with French music being queer and feminine and German being masculine and heterosexual.⁵⁴ I would argue that there are varying degrees of this compositional observation found within heterosexual and homosexual music. For instance, George Auric and Darius Milhaud were both straight members of Les Six and are known for this

⁴⁹ Ibid., 254.

⁵⁰ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 50.

⁵¹ Eve Sedgwick *Epistemology of the Closet* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 159.

⁵² Fowlie, “Sexuality in Gide’s Self-Portrait,” 255.

⁵³ Paul Anderson ““To Become as Human as Possible”: The Influence of Andre Gide on Aaron Copland,” 52.

⁵⁴ Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound*, 145-151.

French style of tonality (although Milhaud did cross into the world of polytonality). While they were both French and writing mostly tonal music, this does not align with the effeminate idiom of French music. Through this process of deduction, we must take a closer examination of what compositional techniques queer composers in France were gravitating toward.

Nadine Hubbs argues that for American and French composers of the early to mid-twentieth century, French music stood for feminine qualities, and women in some cases.⁵⁵ While this may be true, I will expound and specify other qualities that queer composers highlighted in their compositions. French music at the time was considered a counter movement to Germanic music. Not only was French music tonal, but it had sense of musical rebellion. This rebellion is manifested in its overt tonality. Within the music of Les Six, Maurice Ravel, Erik Satie, and many other French composers, is a sense of complete consonance. Some examples are *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Ravel, *Gymnopedie* by Satie, and *Suite Française for Small Orchestra* by Francis Poulenc. Certainly, one can still find the ebb and flow of tension and release, but this style is by no means comparable to the dissonance of Germanic music of the time. In this extreme consonant tonality is where emphasis was placed.

While direct dissonance was rare in French music, there were other ways to show personality within this style of music. The first and most queerly used, is *camp*. In a musical context, this is any unorthodox musical happening. It could be a dramatic style change, a superfluous flourish, or in some instances an intentional dissonance. There are degrees of this campy compositional writing. Poulenc's writing style represents one extreme of camp. One might argue that Ravel's writing style represents another extreme. Both composers are undeniably French in their compositional style while exuding various degrees of camp.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 150.

This variation is where one can find the distinction of queer composers. This campy compositional style originated from questioning social constructs. Queer people share a universal experience of questioning why they are queer, what makes them queer, and/or why society does not readily accept queerness. This cognitive dissonance creates unresolved tension that many queer individuals still cope with today. Musically, this translates to composers questioning established compositional foundations. More specifically, the French and French-taught composers fought against the academically accepted Germanic, atonal music movement of the early 20th century. This idea can translate to non-queer individuals too. Hubbs mentions that David Diamond, a queer composer, identified with the music of Ravel and Satie.⁵⁶ Both composers, particularly Satie, fought against the social norms of the time. After the passing of Ravel, Diamond composed *Elegy in Memory of Ravel*. This piece shows Diamond's less campy style, which is expected from a serious and somber piece like an elegy.

Evidence of the musical parallel between fighting the social norm and French music can be found in Ned Rorem's ideas on French music. He states, "I went to France because I was already French, not the other way around".⁵⁷ This again alludes to the idea that "Frenchness" was related to queerness or societal rebellion.

Copland, a frugal and reserved man, leaned into this "straight passing" stylization by dressing in masculine attire.⁵⁸ He was accepting of others who dressed in a campy fashion and acted in a campy manner, but never would participate himself. He often opposed societal conventions vicariously through others.⁵⁹ Musically, he partook of the camp behavior found in

⁵⁶ Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound*, 141.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁸ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 50.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 53.

his colleagues while himself writing in a conservative style. There are many possible reasons why he would have done this. First, he was raised in a very strict religious environment. Second, many gay men chose to hide their sexual identity for the sake of familial approval. Another possibly more significant reason for Copland's conservative writing style was that during his youth he experienced an emergence of systemic hate towards gay men.

Copland's youth coincided with a social movement in the middle class. Chauncy states that due to the increase of more heterosocial places, more heterosexual relationships started to form.⁶⁰ A consequence of this change was the societal need for middle class men to identify themselves as heterosexual. This specifically affected white collar jobs, including musicians.⁶¹ Aaron Copland would have observed this and thus been more hesitant to display his homosexuality. I suggest that this is why we see a decline in the subliminal messages in his compositions.

This reservation manifested itself within Copland's personal relationships. He would often have romantic relations with his students, following the pattern of the ancient Greek style of homosexuality. In this type of relationship the older, wiser, and often straighter passing partner would mentor the younger. In the early twentieth century these older men were called "husbands," "wolves," or "jockers."⁶² These men were also considered "normal" within the societal standards but had a clear preference for male partners. Copland particularly related to this model of relationship because it allowed him to keep his masculine persona, while also keeping a looser attachment style to his love interest. This allowed Copland to have several

⁶⁰ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 117-119.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

partners throughout his lifetime; something that allowed him to be straight to the public, while privately being a gay man.

Copland sought relations with men who were musical cohorts, and often would cruise with friends. In September 1929, Copland spent a week in Berlin with Marc Blitzstein. They stated that they spent time going to the opera together, a common activity for gay men. The importance of opera in homosexual culture cannot be understated. David Evans states “their particularly intense presence in opera suggests no random cultural accident but a deep cultural symbiosis between the fundamental passion and artifice credited to both opera and homosexuality.”⁶³ This connection will be discussed in depth later with the analysis of *The Tender Land*. Copland and Blitzstein attended operas together and participated in the gay cruising scene in Berlin. By this time Berlin had become known as a popular gay cruising scene and often attracted “sex tourists.”⁶⁴

Copland’s 1920s America

When Copland traveled back to America, he tested his new philosophies concerning his sexuality. The first instance of this was the relationship he shared with Israel Citkowitz. Citkowitz was a very talented violin player who later studied with Nadia Boulanger. Copland and Citkowitz first met in 1926, when Citkowitz was sixteen. Copland wrote a piece for solo violin and piano entitled *Nocturne*. I suggest that this piece is an homage to their relationship.

Nocturne for violin and piano has a very strong blues influence and is reminiscent of Copland’s earlier nocturnal works. French influence can also be heard within this piece. Israel is represented as the violin and Copland as the piano. The piece starts out with a contemplative

⁶³ David T. Evans, “Speaking Over and Above the Plot,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 2 (2005), 105.

⁶⁴ Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 188.

piano introduction. The ascending minor third is a very prevalent motif found throughout the work. This minor third is transferred from the piano to the violin in a quasi-call and response manner. Throughout the work, the violin has a very contemplative melody, while the piano is outlining the harmony underneath in a rhythmic ostinato. These musical patterns represent their relationship dynamic. Citkowitz often confided in Copland and looked to him for sympathy.⁶⁵ While they did live together for a summer in France later in their relationship, little came of it because of Citkowitz's poor mental health.⁶⁶

Along with meeting other prevalent composers, Copland would often visit popular cruising sites like the YMCA and cafeterias. Not only were these affordable places to eat during the time, but were also places where gay men could socialize and “let down their hair,” which was a term for being their authentic selves, leaving behind their straight passing personas.⁶⁷ Copland would have interacted with other gay men of the time, and more than likely participated in the discourse about popular culture and current events.

At this time Copland was scattered in his writings and critiques. He took jazz influences and incorporated them in his compositions, while at the same time calling jazz “piquant” and “grotesque.”⁶⁸ However, Pollack suggests that these words could be interpreted as “excitement” for “piquant” and the “sensuality” of sex for “grotesque.”⁶⁹ David Metzger discusses how in Copland's early works he used jazz idioms to portray sexuality. He states, “This appropriation erotically charges the work as the blues, like African-American music in general, were

⁶⁵ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 179-180.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁷ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 163.

⁶⁸ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 114.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

considered a manifestation of a ‘primitive’ black sexuality, a perception that gave the idiom and aura of carnality”.⁷⁰ This use of jazz as a portrayal of primal sexuality was a common theme amongst the white queer community. In Harlem, a predominantly black suburb, there were public displays of homosexuality in drag balls that were giving a voice to sexual non-conformists throughout the early twentieth century.⁷¹ These drag balls were public displays of homosexuality, with many spectators both black and white.

This mixing of racial demographics had various reactions, however. While the white gay community that spectated these drag balls viewed them as a safe place to display and interact with their own community, the black queer community did not view it this way.⁷² Some members of the black community often openly expressed hostility toward whites who came to these balls.⁷³

With Copland certainly observing the gay community, and more plausibly being active in it, he would have at least heard of these issues. The impact the blues had on his compositions is evident in Copland’s use of jazz idioms within his music during his time in Paris and in his works until the early 1930s. In Copland’s 1927 review, he stated that jazz is only for the composer to draw inspiration for love, tragedy, and remorse.⁷⁴ This is a similar description to what Eric Garber states how the blues were portrayed during drag balls, “They told of loneliness,

⁷⁰ David Metzger, “‘Spurned Love’: Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland,” 425-426.

⁷¹ Eric Garber “A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 326.

⁷² Ibid., 326.

⁷³ Chauncey, *The Gay New York*, 163.

⁷⁴ David Schiff, “Copland and the ‘Jazz Boys’” in *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews* ed. Peter Dickinson (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2002), 14.

homesickness, and poverty, of love and good luck, and they provided a window into the difficult, often brutal work of the New Negro movement”.⁷⁵ Copland possibly heard the music at these drag balls and took inspiration from them. Within the homoerotic *Nocturne*, one can see how Copland was using jazz harmonies, such as the standard blues pattern. Mitzer states, “*Nocturne* can be seen as a musical realization of this white homosexual congregation around blackness”.⁷⁶

While Copland did not start using jazz influences in his compositions when he came back to America, they certainly became more obvious upon his return. While in Paris, he composed *Music for the Theatre* in which he has a movement entitled “Burlesque.” Howard Pollack goes into detail regarding how this movement was reminiscent of the American burlesque Copland saw on 42nd Street, which was a very public gay cruising area.⁷⁷ This is evidence that the composer portrayed his experiences with the queer culture at the time within his music. Along this line is the connection between the queer scene within Harlem and Copland’s jazz influenced works.

While writing compositions influenced by jazz was a common theme at the time, most other compositions were often appropriated from different cultures. Copland followed this pattern to a degree. Copland’s use of cultural appropriation, however, alludes more to the perceived sexual nature of that culture, and less with the actual culture itself. As Metzger states “These men and women sought an erotic foothold in the stereotyped realm of black sexuality, in which, they believed, a sexual behavior, including same-sex activity, was not constrained.”⁷⁸ Copland did not continue using these jazz idioms in his writing for very long. With the rise of

⁷⁵ Eric Garber, “A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem,” 320.

⁷⁶ David Metzger, ““Spurned Love”: Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland,” 428.

⁷⁷ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 114.

⁷⁸ David Metzger, ““Spurned Love”: Eroticism and Abstraction in the Early Works of Aaron Copland,” 427.

jazz and Jewish music being a joint product, Copland was very prompt to distinguish himself from this.⁷⁹ Copland's review of William Grant Still's music reiterated the point that he did not want jazz to become the American sound within the realm of classical music.⁸⁰

Copland and His Personal Relations

Copland observed and participated in one of the most transformative periods in queer history. Aspects of Copland's relationships (such as age of his partner and relationship duration) were ever changing, as was queer culture. The 1920s through pre-World War II was a transitional time in the queer community. There were no hard labels of "gay" or "straight." These terms would not come to light until after the war. However, there was still a need for men, particularly those in the middle class, to differentiate themselves from "inverts." The factor that differentiates heterosexual and homosexual men was the active role in intercourse. The man who took the "masculine" role was deemed as "normal," while the man who took the "feminine" role was considered the "invert or "she-man."⁸¹ The connotative contrast dealt more with considering the homosexual man as a woman. This allowed men who took the "masculine" role to have sexual interactions with men and not be considered out of the ordinary.

For a man, having homosexual intercourse in their youth was commonplace at the time. One young man states that in college,

There were a couple of guys who could actually see through me, both of whom I think turned out to be totally straight. They would say, 'Want to come down to my room?' And I would sneak down after lights out, we would fuck each other between the legs. That's what friends are for! It was just a mechanical act. More fun than doing it by yourself or doing it with a pillow – or milk bottle. We tried everything.⁸² He then later figured out that it was coined a 'first – year Princeton.'

⁷⁹ Ibid., 430.

⁸⁰ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 160.

⁸¹ Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 121.

⁸² Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 6.

Another account of a young man who was a not necessarily cruising, but a natural opportunity for casual sex occurred is recalled:

I think the first homosexual experience that I had, or one of the first, was in 1924, when somebody stopped by the dormitory my freshman year. He came in the dormitory, which of course he shouldn't have done, and I don't know how it occurred – very quickly I reached ejaculation and as one does I had this terrible remorse and terrible resentment and told him that if he ever came back I would tell the authorities. He did come back, and I think I was a bit glad to see him.⁸³

While both accounts tell of sexual experiences in college, this would occur at other places where young men would gather, like bars. This further proves that sexuality, while acknowledged, was not enough to separate into different classifications. This lack of separation created some issues within the homosexual community, however.

The lack of classification allowed the men who were considered straight to take advantage of those who did not. The homosexual who was considered more effeminate was not allowed such luxury. A recollection of the homosexuals of such types are accounted:

The male homosexual is effeminate: the picture of the “fairy” and the female impersonator, the transvestist at the drag. It is my belief... that this effeminacy is psychologically induced and that it is found to a marked extent only in small proportion of homosexuals. Actually the effeminate invert usually forms a subgroup within the group, for he is *persona non grata* among the more virile. “I am no better than they are,” a homosexual of the virile type will say, “but I just couldn't afford to be seen in their company.” If a homosexual must wear the mask, he cannot associate with those who have discarded it. For the “ambisextrous” men, the effeminate people, on the fringe of a fringe of society, as it were, play a role which is neither recognized nor appreciated. The lack of suspicion surrounding most homosexuals in their daily lives, which makes it so easy for them to carry their masks and conceal their activities, can be attributed to man's common illusion that all male homosexuals are recognizable at first glance.⁸⁴

⁸³ Peter M. Nardi, David Sanders, and Judd Marmor, *Growing Up Before Stonewall: Life Stories of Some Gay Men* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 94.

⁸⁴ Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America* (New York: Greenburg, 1951), 92-93.

This is where most homosexual composers lay in the early twentieth century, particularly of the older generation. They were rather “straight passing” or did not associate themselves with the “fairy” type in public. However, in private they would often gather and participate in homosexual activities. Pollack accounts that these composers would often be very “campy” only in private.⁸⁵

In Copland’s world, this era is well documented in his personal affairs. He frequently had intimate relations with other musicians, most notably the composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein. While the details of their interactions are not overtly told, the documents we do have strongly imply a sexual nature. Copland befriended many other American composers like Virgil Thomson and Marc Blitzstein. He also mentored a group of upcoming composers called the “Young Composers” by Pollack, which included Elie Siegmeister, Irwin Heilner, Israel Citkowitz, Lehman Engel, Bernard Herrman, Arthur Berger, Henry Brant, Vivian Fine, and Jerome Moross.⁸⁶ The relationships in this group did not last long, however, due to all their personality clashes.

During the 1930s and 40s, homosexuals often met in small groups to discuss various topics ranging from similar subjects of interest to their sexual escapades. These topics of discussion largely depended on if the group was made of “fairies” or “trade.” Copland would socialize with musicians, then learn about their sexuality. Over the course of his life Copland chose younger men whom he deemed could use his help.⁸⁷ These men would often be young,

⁸⁵ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 237.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

talented musicians. He also accepted the fact that these young men would often not stay with him for very long.

An older man taking in a younger man was a common trope within the gay community at the time. The terms “husbands,” “jockers,” and “wolves” described a working-class man who was straight presenting but preferred the sexual company of men.⁸⁸ Copland fit this classification, although he viewed homosexuality more positively than the stereotype. These “husbands” would often partner with a younger man to teach them. This relationship would not last particularly long, just enough for the younger man to learn what he needed to be independent.

In addition to these short-lived partnerships, Copland also had more permanent relationships. Of which, many were the younger men that he previously had as a partner. This cohort of gay musicians that Copland associated with, the Copland-Thomson circle, consisted of influential American composers of the 20th century and included Leonard Bernstein, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Aaron Copland, David Diamond, Ned Rorem, and Virgil Thomson. Social circles like these were very common within the gay community of the early to middle 20th century. In Cory’s *The Homosexual in America*, a book published in 1951 that discusses homosexual social patterns, he states “some sections of gay society are filled with a keen and lusty interest in common bond that brings the individuals together. They read, wonder, discuss, question.”⁸⁹

The Copland-Thomson circle, which in some part was romantic, was more of a social gathering where they could talk about music and “let their hair down,” meaning that they could

⁸⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 87.

⁸⁹ Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 115.

talk about gay subjects that would not be permissible in public. Copland named this group “Les Boys” which is a homage to the group of French composers “Les Six”. While in France, Copland knew of this group of composers and wanted to model his own circle after theirs.

Copland and The Tender Land

A shift in gay culture occurred after World War II, in which an increase of young adults were having casual sexual relations. Prior to the war, most young adults moved from their parents’ home directly into a home with their spouse. This was no longer the case after the war ended, when there was a massive migration of single young adults to large cities.⁹⁰ Gay men had been doing this since before the war, but after the war numbers increased significantly. Gay bars and other social settings like cafeterias also increased in popularity. There was a shift from privately being queer in one’s home, to bringing one’s queerness to semipublic spaces like private bars. For the first time, gay men felt somewhat comfortable being publicly observed. Stephen Renolds, a gay man living in Manhattan in the 1940s accounts, “There was nobody sleeping on the streets. It was glamour without danger. We dressed, which is a simple thing. You never went to the theater unless you had a black tie on.”⁹¹

This era, however, was also the first time homosexuality as a concept was censored. Rodgers and Hart’s *By Jupiter* (1942) was harshly criticized for having allusions to homosexuality.⁹² When the Kinsey Report (a study done on the sexual behavior of men [1948] and women [1953]) was published, it upset the public with his projections of how many men had homosexual experiences. Kinsey projected that 50 percent of men admitted erotic responses to

⁹⁰ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-170* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 23.

⁹¹ Kaiser, *They Gay Metropolis*, 40.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 16.

their own sex, 37 percent experienced homosexual sex, and four percent were fully homosexual.⁹³ These were extremely high numbers in comparison to the public's perception of the homosexual population. Upon further examination, those numbers were discovered to be exaggerated, and the negative effect they had during their time of publication was not undone.

The Kinsey Report led to more public awareness of homosexuality. With the public now concerned about the effects that homosexual people had on various aspects of their lives, tolerance decreased. During President Eisenhower's term, Senator Joseph McCarthy brought in a period of gay panic and terror now known as the "Lavender Scare." During the implementation of President Eisenhower's "let's clean house" policy, Secretary John Peurifoy testified that "most of the ninety-one employees dismissed for moral turpitude were homosexuals."⁹⁴ McCarthy then publicly proclaimed that he "[had] here in my hand a list of 205-- a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department."⁹⁵ This led to an investigation of state employees. Homosexuals during this investigation were deemed easily blackmailed and morally weak. If a person was suspected of being homosexual, they would be put under investigation, and if they were later determined to be homosexual, they would immediately lose their job.

Homosexual men during this time were very weary of their public perception, because these practices soon impacted all employment. Copland was personally affected by McCarthy. A planned performance of *Lincoln Portrait* was withdrawn from the January 20, 1953 inauguration

⁹³ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 35.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁵ Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual versus The United States of America*, 32.

of President Dwight Eisenhower due to Copland's suspected affiliation with the communist party.⁹⁶ This put Copland in a dry spell compositionally. During this time, however, Aaron Copland was composing his 1958 opera, *The Tender Land*. The librettist, Horace Everett, was a pseudonym for Erik Johns, with whom Copland was in a relationship during the time of composition.

Erik Johns was a modern dancer who first met Copland at a New Year's party. Although Johns was residing in California at the start of their relationship, he wrote Copland frequently. Johns partially convinced Copland to write the score for the film *The Red Pony* so they could see each other.⁹⁷ Hollywood at this time was very open to homosexuals. One Hollywood writer states that, "The studios didn't care what anybody did about anything so long as it was kept private. There was wholesale fucking of all kinds in Hollywood then."⁹⁸ Copland later dedicated the orchestral suite from the score of *The Red Pony* to Johns. Johns then left his home in California to return to the east coast with Copland. They traveled to England and France visiting composers and friends including Britten, Walton, N. Boulanger, Messiaen, and Cage.⁹⁹ They got an apartment together in Greenwich Village, which was then a notoriously gay neighborhood.

Many coded messages within *The Tender Land* represent Copland's and Johns' relationship. First is the medium of opera as an art form. During the entire twentieth century, especially in the first half, gay men would go to and discuss opera on a frequent basis. So much so that in the early twentieth century police officers would consider men that were discussing

⁹⁶ Hubbs, *The Queer Compositions of America's Sound*, 166.

⁹⁷ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 247.

⁹⁸ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 59.

⁹⁹ Pollack, *Aaron Copland*, 247.

opera to be homosexual.¹⁰⁰ Talking about opera in public was also a way of communicating to another homosexual that you were gay.¹⁰¹ There are several reasons why gay men would frequent the opera. One is that the stories portrayed in opera are often tales of forbidden or unrequited love. This was a relatable subject for gay men during this time. Another reason is that the police would not raid opera houses. One gay man recalls, “Since there were no known instances of police raids on such distinguished cultural events, all stops were pulled out far as costume and grooming.”¹⁰² The opera served as a safe space, as well as an artistic outlet for homosexual men throughout the 20th century. Another gay man recalls that after Stonewall opera attendance by homosexual men slightly decreased, but opera continued to be popular, “We consider the opera queen to be a pre-Stonewall throwback because we homophobically devalue opera love as addictive behavior and as displaced eroticism. The opera queen is a dated species: very 1950s.... After sexual liberation, who needs opera?”¹⁰³ This further reiterates that the gay man attended opera to relate to tales of tragic love stories.

Daniel E. Mathers, in *Copland Connotations*, discusses some of the connections between the story of *The Tender Land* and homosexuality. While Mathers’ arguments are excellent, the influence of the existing queer culture was not elaborated on. As mentioned before, the 1940s and 50s queer men were by in large migrating to large cities for romantic opportunities. This migration is well documented in the book *Hometowns* by John Preston. Nearly all of the accounts are of gay men growing up in rural areas that moved to large cities in their adulthood. Within *The Tender Land* the principal character, Laurie Moss, is faced with the decision of

¹⁰⁰ Chauncy, *The Gay New York*, 344.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 275.

¹⁰² Ibid., 351.

¹⁰³ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), 31.

moving to the city with a love interest (Martin) or staying home and fulfilling a familial role. Mathers compares Laurie's kiss with Martin, which was negatively reacted to, as "coming out" since both Laurie's kiss and homosexuality are viewed as a poor "decision" within the social context.¹⁰⁴ While this is a certainly an accurate comparison, the more obvious symbolism is lost. Gay men in the 50s were migrating for sexual liberation, and so was Laurie.

Another point that Mathers makes but misses the more homosexual undertone is that Laurie as a character could have been gender-swapped with a man. He addresses this point by stating that Johns left the interpretation open for feminism, civil rights, and other movements, "for an opera whose orientation is toward an affirmative catch-all must ultimately resist the isolation of sexual difference as a privileged topic within itself, and, if denying all forms of difference, must also risk being about nothing at all."¹⁰⁵ This is an obvious avoidance of the fact that Laurie could be easily swapped for a man. These more obvious innuendos became popular during the Lavender Scare since it was becoming more dangerous to make outright subliminal messages within compositions, lest they be accused of being homosexual.

¹⁰⁴ David E. Mathers, "Expanding Horizons" in *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 132-133.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 130.

Chapter 3 - Marc Blitzstein

Marc Blitzstein (1905-1964), while never as prevalent in the musical scene as Aaron Copland, is an interesting case in terms of the intersectionality of queer culture and musicianship. Blitzstein was born in Philadelphia into an unstable family situation, with his parents separating in 1912. His household was still functional due to his mother, Anna Levitt, who was financially independent due to her banking profession. Blitzstein was heavily affected by his mother and her profession. Anna would harbor new immigrants with the premise that they bank with her. These immigrants would then establish themselves and leave the housing that Anna provided. Blitzstein observed and interacted with these immigrants, mainly Eastern European Jews, but there were many nationalities and cultures that he interacted with at a young age.¹⁰⁶

Blitzstein certainly socialized with these immigrants and picked up several languages and cultural connections, most of them being Yiddish. Within the Jewish community, there is a ritual practice of bathing known as *mikvah*. With the need of a bath, many new immigrants did not have such luxury at home and had to rely on communal baths for this ritual. This is possibly where Blitzstein had his first homosexual experiences. In these communal baths, men would often cruise due to the anonymity of public baths. Chauncey states that private baths were used primarily for this ritual, and thus eliminated the anonymity that many gay men used to keep themselves safe.¹⁰⁷ I refute this by pointing out in Blitzstein's case, many of these immigrants did not end up staying in Philadelphia, but moved on to other cities, thus creating the anonymity that gay men often wanted before engaging in sexual acts.

¹⁰⁶ Howard Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein: His Life, His Work, His World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

¹⁰⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 208.

Evidence of Blitzstein knowing of and participating in gay bath culture can be found in his compositional output as well as his private life. *Blessings of the Bath*, a ballet that Blitzstein composed in 1926, reflect this participation. The movements in this ballet that are relevant to this study are as follows, “Belly Dance, Scene Change;” “In the Bath;” “The Frenchman;” “Drying Fugue.” Howard Pollack discovered the back of the manuscript contained the titles of the movements within a table of alternative titles. He states that these alternate titles allude to the dramatic intentions of the ballet. These alternate titles are, “bathing and rubbing” for “Belly Dance,” an “old man and attendant” for “In the Bath,” “splashing the old man” for “The Frenchman,” “with interruption by the Swimming Lady” for “Drying Fugue.”¹⁰⁸

Examining the titles of each of these movements reveals more about Blitzstein’s knowledge of queer culture. Within queer bath culture, baths were a safer cruising medium than in public spaces.¹⁰⁹ In bathhouses, there would be lockers where individuals could keep their valuables, preventing them from being robbed. The social protocol was also more accepting of queer individuals. Bathhouses would generally keep aggressive men from being permitted on the premises to avoid fighting. This made queer men more confident to practice the subtleties of picking up other queer men.

With this context in mind, the titles “old man and attendant” and “splashing the old man” explores the commentary on the social practice of young men (punks) and older men (husbands or jockers) being sexual partners. “With interruption from the Swimming Lady” also makes more contextual sense, with “the Swimming Lady” interrupting their relation. Blitzstein, while never

¹⁰⁸ Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein*, 46.

¹⁰⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 219.

overtly writing about this in his journals, surely must have witnessed, or even participated in these social practices for queer men.

The next title “the Frenchman” or “splashing the old man,” alludes to another aspect of Blitzstein’s personal life. Blitzstein studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris in the fall of 1926. While in Paris, he worked on *Blessings of the Bath*, and turned it into a full symphonic score.¹¹⁰ While there, Blitzstein wrote to Berenice Skidelsky, a friend of Blitzstein’s aunt Mary, and described the queer scene in France, “Most of the ‘artists’ here give me a rectal pain... they have made a Greenwich Village of it here.”¹¹¹ This further proves that Blitzstein had not only knowledge of the queer scene in America, but also the one in France, and participated in both.

Blitzstein and Bernstein

Marc Blitzstein’s influence on Leonard Bernstein is profound in this realm of queer culture. Blitzstein, considered more on the “out” side of the Copland-Thomson circle, encouraged Bernstein to be more confident in his sexuality than others. Blitzstein was constantly questioning his sexuality in his youth. He confided in friends through letters, “I believe I should be medically classed a bisexual, since I have had sexual experience with women, and liked it.”¹¹² Blitzstein throughout his life preferred his sexual escapades with mostly men. When Blitzstein met Bernstein, he was already confident with his sexuality and was experienced with queer culture.

Blitzstein’s musical, *The Cradle Will Rock*, influenced Bernstein’s own compositional prowess. Bernstein put on *The Cradle Will Rock* at Harvard in 1939. Blitzstein, unlike Bernstein,

¹¹⁰ Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein*, 47.

¹¹¹ Eric Gordon, *Mark the Music* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2000), 24.

¹¹² Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein*, 22.

was brutally honest with himself in terms of his sexuality. Bernstein admired Blitzstein for his confidence in his sexuality and otherwise. Burton states, “[Blitzstein] had a witty sardonic, almost hypnotic presence, and he could put a song across like nobody else Bernstein ever met. His single-mindedness was an object lesson for Bernstein. Here was a man who had made a firm choice when faced with multiple career opportunities: he had decided to become a professional composer.”¹¹³ Bernstein admired Blitzstein due to his devotion to his craft. Bernstein later wrote this about Blitzstein,

Gallantry, vitality. Wry, Talmudic humor. A fresh, slanted view of everything. A secret affair with word-notes. Loyalties of improbable intensity, in unlikely places. Endless affection, grace. Endless capacity to suffer through, quarrel, to find truth, or if not, to invent it. All these have been yours. But mostly, survival. I have always thought of you as the chief survivor – of the welts of passion, the agony of commitment, of a long chain of beautiful work-failures. Never have I seen such glowing failures, all in a row, like falling (but not fallen) angels.¹¹⁴

Throughout Bernstein’s life, he kept in close contact with Blitzstein. Bernstein even quoted Blitzstein’s works in his own, which is well documented in his operas and musicals like *Candide* and *West Side Story*.¹¹⁵

Reuben Reuben

Blitzstein’s opera, *Reuben Reuben*, illuminates some of his thoughts on sexuality later in his life. The two-act opera is about Reuben, a veteran of WWII, who is dealing with extreme mental illness. Reuben is seeking to take his own life due to the weight of the war, and him recently losing his father. The antagonist, Bart, who Blitzstein described as a “repressed homosexual” but also “the embodiment of evil,”¹¹⁶ encourages Reuben to take his own life, even

¹¹³ Humprey Burton, *Leonard Bernstein* (Faber and Faber: Boston, 1994), 54.

¹¹⁴ Leonard Bernstein, *Findings* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1982), 224-225.

¹¹⁵ Jack Gottlieb, *Working with Bernstein* (Amadeus Press: New York, 2010), 168-169.

¹¹⁶ Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein*, 381.

placing bets if he will or not. Nina, the main love interest of Reuben, is the voice of reason throughout the opera, and saves Reuben's life. The major theme of unrequited love is found throughout the opera. While Reuben's and Nina's relationship is alluded to at the end, Blitzstein never wrote for them to kiss, as you would expect lovers to do so in an opera or musical of the time. Even Bart's lover, the Countess, shows unrequited love for Bart. This theme of unrequited love is very common within the queer community of the time.

Another aspect of *Reuben Reuben* that alludes to the queer community is the symbolism of Reuben taking his own life. Blitzstein talks about how in the opera he uses comedy in three ways, "Comedy which is all innocence; comedy which is burlesque-to-satire; and comedy which comprehends tragedy, which interpenetrates the tragic, is not different from it; which surrounds it."¹¹⁷ In the context of the queer community, the second type of comedy that Blitzstein describes could be redefined as *camp*, which was very commonly used in the queer community. The last version of comedy, the tragedy infused variety, was also not uncommon within the queer community. The tragedy within the queer community of not being able to have a partner, or if when choosing to, facing the threat of losing your job or being sent to prison, was a prevalent theme in the writing of *Reuben Reuben*. In the book, *The Gay Metropolis*, Kaiser observes that, "Almost every New York City newspaper reference to lesbians and gay men in the fifties was connected to a crime."¹¹⁸ Reuben attempting to take his own life reflects the state of the queer community. Reuben's decision to take his own life could be replaced with the decision to "come out of the closet." This would explain why Bart (the repressed homosexual) wanted Reuben to

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 380.

¹¹⁸ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 82.

take his own life. This allegory of Reuben coming out of the closet saves Bart from having to possibly be harmed from “coming out.”

Blitzstein’s downfall was due to his participation in queer culture. On January 21, 1964, Blitzstein went out social drinking to a portside bar in Fort-de-France, Martinique. He then met three fishermen, of which he separated with one for a sexual encounter. The other fishermen then jumped him and beat him nearly to death. He was discovered half clothed in the morning and taken to the local hospital. According to Pollack, “[Blitzstein] recovered well enough to identify the three ‘bastards’ to the authorities but asked that his family be told only that he had been in an automobile accident.”¹¹⁹ Blitzstein then died later that day, most likely to a combination of alcoholism side effects worsened by the attack.

¹¹⁹ Pollack, *Marc Blitzstein*, 468.

Chapter 4 - Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) was one of the most influential musical figures of the twentieth century. He was in the forefront of the Mahler revival, as well as bringing many American composers to light by programming their works. He is also known for his *Young People's Concerts* where he would educate children about composers and their works. His private life has recently become a subject of research and most recently came in vogue with the Bradley Cooper film *Maestro*. This film discusses Leonard Bernstein's life with a focus on his relationship with his wife, Felicia Montealegre.

It should be noted that with Bernstein's sexuality now being viewed through a modern lens, there are now terms which more accurately describe Bernstein. These terms, such as bisexual or pansexual, were rarely used during Bernstein's life, and thus throughout his life he was described as a homosexual. This is in no way undermining the relationship that Bernstein had with his wife.

Like Copland and Blitzstein, Bernstein participated in queer culture. When compared to the other two, he was the most "out." This is partially a generational factor and partially due to Bernstein's personality. Like Copland, Bernstein started reading essays on homosexuality in his youth. In the 1930s, Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) were becoming the standard for the medical field.¹²⁰ Bernstein read these and wrote his own rebutting essay entitled *Friends and Freud*. In this essay, Bernstein refutes Freud's essay on homosexuality. This essay was written for his last year at Boston Latin School.¹²¹ This shows that Bernstein was already considering his homosexuality from a young age and was versed in the discourse surrounding it.

¹²⁰ Chauncey, *The Gay New York*, 123-124.

¹²¹ Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 28-29.

In the 1930s, it still was unsafe for someone to be overtly homosexual. Morris Kight (1919-2003) recalls what it was like to be homosexual in the 30s, “I’m not sure how to phrase it, because there were various degrees of gayness. If you proclaimed gayness, which I think would have gotten you killed, socially ostracized, or discriminated against in the 1930s and ‘40s and maybe even the early ‘50s, you just couldn’t do that.”¹²² Bernstein was very cautious of this but was still more open about his sexuality than others at the time. This may be because he was romantically pursuing women as well as men, and thus was less likely to be accused of being homosexual.

When Bernstein went to Harvard, he was not actively engaging with romantic partners. Much like Virgil Thomson’s time at Harvard, they were very busy with their coursework and accompanying various choirs and glee clubs. A notable homosexual interaction that Bernstein had was with the distinguished conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos (1896-1960). Bernstein met Mitropoulos at a reception that the Harvard Helicon Society organized. Mitropoulos was suspected of being a homosexual throughout his entire career. It is speculated that Bernstein and Mitropoulos had a romantic relationship, although the evidence cannot say one way or another. Regardless of whether they had a romantic relationship, they shared a strong friendship. Mildred Spiegel (a childhood friend of Bernstein’s) recalls that when she attended lunch with Mitropoulos and Bernstein that Mitropoulos, “in a seductive gesture, put an oyster on the end of his fork and gave it to Leonard to eat.”¹²³ In William R. Trotter’s biography of Mitropoulos he shares an account of the lunch after Mitropoulos’s rehearsal with the Boston Symphony where Bernstein observed, “‘Do you know,’ Mitropoulos said slowly, ‘the moment I set eyes on you, I

¹²² Nardi, Sanders, and Marmor, *Growing up before Stonewall*, 15-16.

¹²³ Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 37.

felt a something – a feeling of the presence of – greatness; of something – genius.’ There it was, openly spoken by his new idol: the G-word. At the sound of those words, intoned with the added majesty of Mitropoulos’s beautiful continental accent, Bernstein was rendered ‘limp with realization. The man had spoken it....’¹²⁴

Bernstein had gained a few mannerisms from Mitropoulos as well. Peyser’s biography discusses these mannerisms, “People who knew both Mitropoulos and Bernstein add that the younger man adopted the older man’s habit of stripping to the waist in the presence of visitors backstage and of inviting privileged young disciples into the bathroom of the Green Room to facilitate in private talk.”¹²⁵ Just as Copland took on Schaffer’s mannerisms, Bernstein took on Mitropoulos’s. This again, was not uncommon for the time, and like Bernstein and Mitropoulos, homosexual relationships were more short term and situational.¹²⁶

In future correspondence by letter, Bernstein relays his feelings of isolation and longing for a more lasting relationship. In *The Occult*, a short autobiographical novel by Bernstein, he portrays these feelings after writing a letter to Mitropoulos shortly after the anniversary of their first meeting. “He (Bernstein) recalled sadly that Mavro (Mitropoulos) had promised to write him and even send him some of his compositions. Yet he had no word from him.... He could not help feeling that his relationship... had been only the result of the great man’s need to give his love to every human.”¹²⁷ This “need to give his love to every human” must have made a great impression on young Bernstein. Throughout Bernstein’s life, he often was seen to be an

¹²⁴ William R. Trotter, *Priest of Music* (Portland, Amadeus Press, 1995), 86.

¹²⁵ Joan Peyser, *Bernstein* (New York, Billboard Books, 1998), 58-59.

¹²⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 88.

¹²⁷ Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 45.

extremely loving person, sometimes to a fault. The relationships that received this love would certainly last, but not all.

The next individual who would shape Bernstein's life, both intimately and in his career, was Aaron Copland. Bernstein first met Copland at a recital. Following the recital, Copland invited Bernstein to his home for his birthday party. Bernstein then played Copland's *Piano Variations* at the party, per request of Copland. Other gay composers such as Virgil Thomson and Paul Bowles were at this party. While there are conjectures of Copland and Bernstein being romantically involved at some point in their relationship, less evidence alludes to this. In letters to each other, the relationship suggests more of a father/son relationship than a romantic one. Bernstein consulted Copland on very personal matters, love interests, and career choices alike.

The first time Bernstein was able to participate in queer culture was when he moved to New York City in the summer of 1939, after graduating from Harvard. Bernstein had visited New York City in previous summers, exposing him to queer culture, but 1939 was the first time he was immersed in it. Bernstein would frequent the Village Vanguard club in Greenwich Village.¹²⁸ In the 1930s, Greenwich Village was booming with drag balls, entertainers, and speakeasies, which caused an increase in police raids.¹²⁹ By the time Bernstein was in Greenwich Village, however, the police raids, while still occurring, were less common with the end of prohibition.

By the time Bernstein arrived in Greenwich Village, it was well known for its bohemian culture: sexually and otherwise. In 1936 a medical journal titled *Current Psychology and Psychoanalysis* released an article calling Greenwich Village, "the Mecca for exhibitionists and

¹²⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁹ Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 314.

perverts of all kinds.”¹³⁰ This once again shows that Bernstein was not afraid to be associated with other queer individuals. In a letter to Copland, to whom he described many of his sexual interactions, “I wrote you from a horrid room in a ghastly 42nd St. hotel, where a fat guy across the alley tried to seduce me.”¹³¹ 42nd Street, as was discussed earlier, was a major cruising area for homosexual men.

In another letter correspondence between Copland and Bernstein, Copland was harassing Bernstein for being “outdone” romantically by the composer David Diamond (1915-2005). Bernstein argues this, “Don’t let him lead you into that ‘outdone me’ stuff; the soldier (what a boy!) would rather have come with me but David Diamond had done all the *work* and the soldier was afraid of a scene. As it turned out, he came to my room the next night, full of love and amusement.”¹³² This is not surprising for gay men such as Diamond and Bernstein to pick up sailors for intercourse. Sailors in the early twentieth century were “manly, unattached, and unconstrained by conventional morality,” which made sailors the preferred person for unattached relationships.¹³³ These relations were often only one night, and often both parties could and would be perceived as “straight” in the public sphere. This freedom from “conventional morality” meant that these men could have sexual relations with another man, without the public knowing. They would often go onto marrying a woman and having a family. Since these men were *trade*, they were not considered the *invert* since they took the man’s role in intercourse. They could freely participate in the homosexual bachelor culture as they wanted.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 234.

¹³¹ Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 102.

¹³² Ibid., 109.

¹³³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 78.

Leonard Bernstein, much like these sailors, participated in gay culture in this way. Since both Bernstein and many of these sailors (but not all) would be considered bisexual or pansexual, they could lean into their “straight passing” persona. Unlike more campy individuals like Mitropoulos, they would not be suspected of homosexuality. Over time, Bernstein did become more and more suspected of homosexuality. These suspicions were less prevalent in his youth, since he was frequently engaged in relations with women as well.

Bernstein and *West Side Story*

West Side Story is Bernstein’s most recognized work. It has been studied immensely; however, there are some hidden innuendos that can be revealed when cross examining queer culture and the music of *West Side Story*. During the years it was composed, 1949 to 1957, several changes were made to the score to avoid being too direct with the creative team’s political movements. At the first conception, it was a political statement between the animosity felt between Catholics and Jews.¹³⁴ Originally, Juliet (Maria) was going to be Jewish and Tony a Catholic. This overt political stance was deemed too much for the audiences of the time and was edited to be a racial conflict between Italian and Puerto Rican immigrants instead. The key detail that survived between the two editions was how Tony and his gang remained in the same social demographic. Tony was originally going to be an Italian Catholic from Greenwich Village.¹³⁵ Italian Catholics were one of the largest populations in New York in the early 20th century, and Italian men primarily were considered as *trade*. As discussed earlier, these men would be “straight passing” and would often end up in long term relationships with women, despite their sexual history with men. One such account in Chauncey’s *Gay New York* stated, “He was

¹³⁴ Leonard Bernstein, *Findings*, 144.

¹³⁵ Burton, *Leonard Bernstein*, 274.

sexually active with other men, but he tried to protect his reputation by developing a conventionally masculine style in the other spheres of his life.”¹³⁶

Within the context of *West Side Story*, Tony’s gang (the Jets), consisted of this demographic of adolescent men. This is a reference to the queer culture in New York City, especially when considering that Tony (and thus his gang) are from Greenwich Village, which was a queer haven in New York City. Bernstein, having observed this culture in his youth, made this subliminal reference. These adolescent men often had sexual relations with other men in their youth and then married women and had families later in life. Others would also participate in this culture, while having a family life, and use the sheer size of the city to their advantage for anonymity.¹³⁷ It would be very possible for some of the gang members to have sexual relations with each other. This might be a reason why Riff (a member of the Jets) does not want Tony to leave the gang. Apart from Tony being the leader of the Jets, Riff gets particularly possessive of Tony after he proclaims his forbidden love of Maria.

The other gang, “The Sharks,” were Puerto Rican immigrants. During the 1950s, “African Americans and Puerto Ricans would become the primary targets of sodomy prosecutions.”¹³⁸ An account of a group of gay Puerto Rican prostitutes would be seen on 42nd Street. “The boys were teenagers on into their twenties, a mix of whites and some Puerto Ricans.”¹³⁹ With both gangs’ demographics being known for homosexuality, Bernstein and the other creative minds in the making of *West Side Story* obviously wanted to make a political point about the underground homosexual culture within New York City.

¹³⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 81.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 133-134.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁹ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 83.

The song in *West Side Story* that has the most prevalent connections to queer culture is “Gee Officer Krupke.” The history of the song even has suggestions to queer culture. In Carol J. Oja’s *Bernstein Meets Broadway*, she discusses Bernstein’s use of “gender bending comedy.”¹⁴⁰ The humor from “Gee Officer Krupke” comes from Bernstein’s musical *On the Town*, which pushed the limits of how women were perceived by highlighting the masculinity of women. In *West Side Story*, Bernstein does the opposite by pushing the femininity of men. Oja states, “In [West Side Story], juvenile delinquents catalogue various forms of deviancy that included cross-dressing.”¹⁴¹ Gender bending in the 1950s was illegal and was considered a more egregious crime than the actual act of homosexuality. President Eisenhower’s executive order (which removed anyone from government work suspected of “sexual perversion,” a term which defined at prosecutor’s discretion) it was imperative for queer people to remain within gender roles to avoid suspicion.¹⁴² A gay man living during this time describes the difference between being gay and being a fag: the difference being the presentation of oneself.

But there is a world of difference between sleeping with men and identifying oneself as a gay person. Culture’s insidious equating of gender and sexuality not only leads gay men to be perceived as effeminate; it also allows for an identity to be constructed through that equation. In providing me with an identity – fag – an identity based primarily on my (unintentional) refusal for gender norms, Greenfield in some sense made possible my eventual recognition of myself as gay.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Carol J. Oja, *Bernstein Meets Broadway* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 243.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 243.

¹⁴² Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 80.

¹⁴³ John Champagne, “Greenfield, Wisconsin,” in *Hometowns: Gay Men Write About Where They Belong*, ed. John Preston (New York: Plume, 1991), 71.

What this gay man is stating is that a man could have sexual relations with a man, while not being gay. The presentation and self-identification of being more effeminate was the factor that made one gay.

In *West Side Story*, there are many references to this gender bending identification. The first, and possibly most obvious reference to this is the character “Anybody.” This character would be considered a “tom-boy” in the language of the time. While the gender of the person remains very androgynous, both the 1961 and 2021 film this character is played by a person assigned female at birth. This gender bending role was a nod to the lesbian community, with many lesbians of the time presenting themselves as masculine. These women would be considered “dykes” or “butch.” In modern terminology, the character “anybody” could possibly be understood as a nonbinary or transgender individual.

The next references to gender bending take place in the song “Gee Officer Krupke.” The lyrics of this song make jests at many queer subjects. The first, “My sister wears a mustache, my brother wears a dress” makes direct reference to the gender bending discussed earlier. Another line “Gee, Officer Krupke we’re down on our knees, ‘cause no one wants a fellow with a social disease” could be taken as the Sharks simply begging the officer to let them go. When putting it in a queer context, it refers to fellatio while also referencing how the public in the 1950s viewed homosexuality as a social disease. In 1951, Donald Webster Cory published *The Homosexual in America* which has an entire chapter devoted to the discourse of whether homosexuality could be cured.

The last line is one that changed from the original Broadway production to the 1961 film. In the Broadway production the line is “My grandpa is always plastered.” In the 1961 film, the line is “My grandpa is a commie.” This line is a reference to the Lavender Scare. With America

being on high alert for communist sympathizers, queer people fell under this scrutiny. The need to “remain in the closet” became more important. By changing the lyric from just “my grandpa is always plastered” to “my grandpa is a commie” not only referenced a condition that was deemed unwanted, but also referenced the fear that the queer community experienced.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

In conclusion, Aaron Copland, Marc Blitzstein, and Leonard Bernstein, all remarkable and influential composers, were also active participants in queer culture. Other notable American composers that were within this circle that are not mentioned include Samuel Barber, Paul Bowles, David Diamond, Lou Harrison, Gian Carlo Menotti, Ned Rorem, Virgil Thomson, and many others. The sexuality of all these composers played a crucial role in their social lives, as well as their professional. These men, especially the elders of the group (Copland, Blitzstein, and Thomson) had power within the professional world that set the younger members up for musical success. A major factor of admittance into this circle was their queerness.

As discussed earlier, Aaron Copland was one of the first American composers to create this cohort. While other queer composers surely existed before him, such as Charles Griffes, Copland was one of the first queer composers to create a tight knit circle based on their queerness and musical aspirations. These composers all influenced each other primarily in their music and philosophies concerning sexuality. The interactions between these composers and how they were affected by their sexuality is for future work.

While some of the finer details of these composers' sexuality are lost to time, it is important to contextualize their life and works with the queer community in which each queer composers participated in. This intersectionality is imperative for research regarding the personal lives of these composers.

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