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"Rodeo" by Aaron Copland
Movement #5 - "Hoedown"

Aaron Copland was an American composer born in Brooklyn, NY on November 14, 1900. He died on December 2, 1990. His works were varied, including chamber music, film scores, jazz, opera, and ballet. One of his ballets, "Rodeo", is a story of American cowboys. The fifth part, called "Hoedown", is the concluding movement of the ballet.

"Hoedown" starts out fast and strong. The brass section dominates the opening section. After the brass section states part of the theme, the strings begin a new section, imitating the sound of horses running. This idea is furthered by the percussion section, making a sound very much like the hooves of a horse striking the ground. Without pause, the strings take up the theme again. This statement of the theme is emphasized by the percussion section.

After the strings state the theme a couple of times, there is an abrupt switch to a part started by the brass, then picked up by the strings. After this part is restated softly by the brass, the entire orchestra seems to take it up in a significantly louder tone. This builds to a celebratory sound, which in my recording including hollering cowboys! This part ended with such triumphant finality that one might think that the piece was over. However, after a very brief pause, we hear the strings and percussion once again imitating the sound of running horses. This time, though, it's much softer and winds down as it is joined by the bass notes of a brass instrument, possibly a tuba.

Very quickly after the sound of horses winds down, the entire orchestra joins in for a final statement of the theme. The theme is stated just as it was in the beginning, but then it is restated loudly and fully, sounding very celebratory and triumphant. This final statement leads to a few concluding blasts by the tuba heard earlier, accompanied by the timpani, signaling a triumphant end to the movement.

I have never seen the ballet, nor have I listened to it in its entirety. However, I can imagine that the conclusion of this piece brings the entire story to an ending that is quite clear and pleasing to the audience.

Based on what we have studied in this class, I think that this piece most closely identifies with Rondo form. The main theme is stated up front (A), followed by the sound of horses (B), followed again by the main theme (A), followed by the celebration in the middle (C), followed again by the horses (B), and finally, closing with a triumphant statement of the main theme (A).

I chose a piece by Aaron Copland because of the fond memories that I associate with his work. My father, who loves music, introduced me to Copland many years ago. "Hoedown", along with many of his other pieces, brings a modern sound to my young ears and encourages me, and the rest of my generation, not to be so quick to write off "classical" music. I would highly recommend this piece, especially to someone who might think that classical music just isn't for them.

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Well done!