

“This weekend, the Houston Symphony welcomes John Adams back to Jones Hall for an exciting all-American program. In addition to his own compositions, Adams has chosen two pieces with special meaning for him,” Charles Ives’s *The Unanswered Question* and Aaron Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*. Icelandic pianist Vikingur Olafsson joins the orchestra for a performance of Adams’s funky and fantastical third piano concert, *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?*

–Calvin Dotsey

You can find the full program, complete with conductor and artist bios, [on our website](#).

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

JOHN ADAMS’S *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?*

John Adams composed *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* as a commission by the Los Angeles Philharmonic for pianist Yuja Wang and in response to other difficult works for piano and orchestra like Liszt’s *Totentanz* and Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*.

Listen
Here!

Questions to Consider:

- John Adams is considered one of the most celebrated living American composers. What words come to mind when you listen to this concerto? Does it sound American to you? Why or why not?
- There are some unique instruments in this piece, including Almglocken, Bass guitar, and a “honky-tonk piano.” Listen to these sections with these instruments. Why do you think John Adams chose to include them in these sections?
 - [“honky-tonk piano”](#)
 - [Bass Guitar Example 1](#)
 - [Bass Guitar Example 2](#)

Videos to learn more:

[John Adams on Jazz and Rock Influences](#)

[John Adams on Composing "Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?"](#)

Videos to learn more about the guest artist, Vikingur Olafsson:

[Vikingur Ólafsson: Tiny Desk Concert](#)

[Vikingur Ólafsson in Conversation](#)

[Vikingur Ólafsson: A portrait of the Icelandic pianist](#)

AARON COPLAND'S Suite from *Appalachian Spring*

When Aaron Copland composed *Appalachian Spring*, he had already composed four ballet scores exploring the American West. *Appalachian Spring* illustrates a pioneer celebration around a newly built farmhouse for a young bride and groom in the Pennsylvania hills. The premiere of this ballet was in a small library auditorium and was originally written for only 13 musicians (the smallest ensemble that could fit in the orchestra pit of the library auditorium). About six months after the premiere, Copland abridged the ballet into a suite and arranged it for a full symphonic orchestra.

Listen
Here!

Appalachian Spring is wrought with themes introduced by solo instruments that carry and develop throughout the orchestra. Listen to [this theme](#), introduced about halfway through the piece by the flutes and first violins.

- If you keep listening (12:00 – 14:05), you will find this theme is passed to almost every section in the orchestra. Listen for your own instrument; does your instrument play the theme? Does your instrument play the theme alone or with other instruments?
- **Play this excerpt on your instrument.** It is shown below in the violin register, but you can find the rest of the score [here](#) or [here](#).



Questions to Consider:

- How does Copland's portrayal of American in *Appalachian Spring* differ from John Adams's?
- What images come to mind as you listen to this piece?
- The most recognized section of this piece is the last section, a set of five variations on the Shaker tune, "Simple Gifts." What techniques does John Adams use to build on this simple tune?

Videos to Learn More:

[Great Composers: Aaron Copland](#)

[Summary of Appalachian Spring](#)

[Explaining the "Simple Gifts" variations in Appalachian Spring](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Follow us on social media for special behind-the-scenes content on this performance and other performances throughout the season!

Instagram: @housymphony

TikTok: @houston Symphony

We look forward to seeing you at Jones Hall soon!