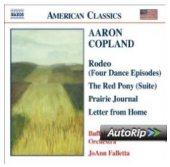
## Copland – Rodeo-The Red Pony-Prairie Journal-Letter From Home (2006)




*1. Prairie Journal (1937) 10:55* Rodeo - Four Dance Episodes (1942) *2. Buckeroo Holiday 7:20 3. Corral Nocturne 3:41 4. Saturday Night Waltz 4:26 5. Hoe Down 3:26 6. Letter from Home (1944) 6:23*
The Red Pony Suite (orchestral version) (1948)
*7. I. Morning on the Ranch 4:27 8. II. The Gift 4:35 9. IIIa. Dream March 2:29 10. IIIb Circus March 2:29 11. IV. Walk to the Bunkhouse 2:58 12. V. Grandfather's Story 4:15 13. VI. Happy Ending 3:11*
Buffalo Philhamonic Orchestra JoAnn Falletta - conductor Recorded at Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, NY USA on January 31 and February 1, 2005

Although it's played and recorded frequently, there is a genuine difference between a decent performance of Rodeo and a really excellent one such as we have here. This difference can be summed up in two words: rhythm and tempo. When it comes to rhythm, it's not merely a question of hitting the syncopations in the opening movement and concluding Hoedown, but of being both accurate and relaxed enough to let the music swing. This is a quality that Bernstein's performances always had, and JoAnn Falletta understands it too. This gives the music both the necessary verve in the outer sections and real balletic grace in the two inner ones, reminding us that we are, after all, hearing a story told through physical movement.

When it comes to tempo, the issue is at once simpler and less impressionistic. In Buckaroo Holiday, speeds have to be quick enough to prevent the music from breaking up into discrete, detached bits. Once again, Falletta & Co. come through with flying colors. The music never sounds mechanical, disconnected, or excessively "Stravinskian". Copland disliked excessive sentimentality, but his music is never dry (the rich, warm, but clear sonics also help in this department). And what turns out to be a successful recipe for Rodeo works just as well in all of the other pieces here. Prairie Journal (a.k.a. Music for Radio) is one of the least known of Copland's "Westerns", but it's every bit as enjoyable as the three great ballets, and this is as fine a performance as you will hear anywhere. Letter from Home is an exercise in nostalgia that

never turns overly sweet.

Best of all, perhaps, is The Red Pony, one of the great film scores of all time, and a glorious work that for some reason seldom gets played live. Copland's invention is of exceptionally high quality throughout, and once again you can hear from the unusual freshness of the opening bars how effortlessly Falletta and the Buffalo players get into the spirit of the music. There are so many delightful moments, from the raucous Circus Music to the unforgettable Walk to the Bunkhouse, a piece that has become the very essence of musical Americana. Finally, it's great to see one of the very popular pieces, like Rodeo, coupled with some less ubiquitous examples of Copland's genius. A wonderful disc! ---David Hurwitz

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