From the 1920s through the 1940s many figures strove to effect a rapprochement between classical music and jazz. The most famous early effort in this direction was the Experiment in Modern Music organized by Paul Whiteman in 1924, an event that introduced music from both sides of the aisle, including the newly composed *Rhapsody in Blue* by George Gershwin. In ensuing years a few other bandleaders would also tender commissions to classical composers. Woody Herman, for example, persuaded Stravinsky to compose his *Ebony Concerto* (for clarinet and jazz band) for his ensemble, Herman’s Herd, in 1945. Benny Goodman, “The King of Swing,” reached even more deeply into the classical aesthetic, requesting pieces for non-jazz groups that he could play as a classical clarinetist. Thus were born Bartók’s *Contrasts* (for clarinet, violin, and piano) in 1938 and Hindemith’s Clarinet Concerto in 1947.

Both Herman and Goodman approached composer Aaron Copland at about the same time, the former in the summer of 1946 and the latter in early 1947. Goodman became the successful suitor, offering a very substantial fee of $2,000, and Copland set to work on the commission shortly thereafter while on a tour in South America. The concerto’s progress is documented through letters Copland addressed to Leonard Bernstein. On September 24, 1947, Copland wrote from Rio de Janeiro: “I’ve just about begun work on the B. Goodman piece.” A little more than a year later, on October 18, 1948, he wrote:

> Nothing much has been happening. I stayed home a lot and finished my Clarinet Concerto — endlich [finally]! Tried it over for Benny [Goodman] the other day. He had Dave O [the clarinetist David Oppenheim] around for moral support. (O what an angelicums that O is!) Seems I wrote the last page too high “for all normal purposes.” So it’ll have to come down a step.

The concerto had a considerable gestation period for a piece that lasts roughly 14 minutes. The poignantly beautiful first movement seems to have come to Copland...
easily; in fact, its central section was already mostly written, being a recasting of music composed in 1945 for the film *The Cummington Story*. What would happen beyond the first movement stymied Copland for a while, and he set the project aside to germinate while he fulfilled a remunerative contract from Republic Pictures for *The Red Pony* in the winter of 1948. In addition, he had commitments he had to attend to for the summer season at the Berkshire Music Festival (Tanglewood).

Copland finally managed to invent a fast second movement to counterbalance the languorous first, drawing on South American popular music as well as North American jazz. Some of this finale's material is introduced by the solo clarinet in a substantial cadenza that connects the two movements, a section that, as Copland pointed out, “is not ad lib as in cadenzas of many traditional concertos; I always felt there was enough room in interpretation even when everything is written out.”

The concerto waited two years to receive its first performance. (Copland had little control over the situation since Goodman retained exclusive performance rights.) Two separate attempts fell through to schedule a premiere, first with Eugene Ormandy conducting (presumably The Philadelphia Orchestra), and then — despite Bernstein’s pleading — with Serge Koussevitzky leading the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood. On May 21, 1950, Bernstein wrote to Copland to break the news about Koussevitzky’s recalcitrance: “I fought with Kouss valiantly over the Clarinet Concerto, to no avail. Benny & Tanglewood don’t mix in his mind.” So it was that the Concerto was first heard in a broadcast by the NBC Symphony Orchestra, Fritz Reiner conducting, in November 1950. The response was reportedly lukewarm, but Copland and Goodman recorded the work together twice, in 1950 and again in 1963; the second of these recordings proved something of a hit, doing much to establish the piece in the essential clarinet repertoire.

**Instrumentation:** harp, piano, and strings, in addition to the solo clarinet.

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Aaron Copland wrote this brief analytical description of his Concerto for Clarinet and String Orchestra, with Harp and Piano:

The first movement is simple in structure, based upon the usual A-B-A song form. The general character of this movement is lyric and expressive. The cadenza that follows provides the soloist with considerable opportunity to demonstrate his prowess, at the same time introducing fragments of the melodic material heard in the second movement. Some of this material represents an unconscious fusion of elements obviously related to North and South American popular music. (For example, a phrase from a currently popular Brazilian tune, heard by me in Rio, became imbedded in the secondary material in F major.) The overall form of the final movement is that of a free rondo, with several side issues developed at some length. It ends with a fairly elaborate coda in C major.