

IB: Copland – El Salón México

by Alan Charlton

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Recommended scores, books and letters are listed at the end of the article.

There is a collection of photos of Copland in the online Library of Congress archives [here](#) including pictures of Copland with Mexican folk musicians, and with Boulanger and Koussevitsky.

INTRODUCTION

Copland's *El Salón México* is one of the two prescribed works for **International Baccalaureate** standard level (SL) and higher level (HL) for examinations in 2011 and 2012, the other being Mozart's Symphony No. 41, K.551, 'Jupiter'. This article will focus on equipping students with the necessary background knowledge, analytical understanding and technical vocabulary to allow students to answer the set-work essay questions of the IB examination relating to *El Salón México*.

El Salón México is also a good introduction to **students of other syllabuses** on several topics to do with 20th-century music: the integration of folk music into classical music, 20th-century rhythmic techniques, harmony and orchestration.

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) is among the most widely known American classical composers. Growing up in New York, he studied piano and music theory, before spending three years in Paris, studying composition with Nadia Boulanger. While there, he became familiar with the radical new music of Europe at the time, from composers such as Stravinsky, Bartók, Schoenberg, de Falla, Prokofiev and the members of 'Les Six', who included Milhaud, Auric and Poulenc. He returned to America in 1924, having received a commission from Boulanger to write a symphony for organ and orchestra. The success of its New York performance allowed him to break into the American music scene, with the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitsky, subsequently becoming a great champion of Copland. Works of the subsequent years included the jazz-influenced Piano Concerto, and the more austere Short Symphony and *Statements* (1935), reflecting some of his more radical European influences. He then made a decision to try to make his music appeal more to audiences whose tastes revolved around the established classics, later writing: 'I felt it was worth the effort to see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.' (Aaron Copland, *The New Music 1900–60*, page 160.) Shortly afterwards, he produced his first popular success, a ten-minute orchestral piece – *El Salón México* (1936), based on Mexican tunes.

Continuing with this approach of using simple material to engage audiences, he produced his highly successful ballets, all on American themes and all incorporating American folk music: *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944). While he is mostly known for his orchestral works, other notable pieces include *Fanfare for the Common Man* (1942), the opera *The Tender Land* (1954), the Clarinet Concerto (1948) and *Quiet City* (1940). He also wrote songs, piano music, chamber music, film scores and music for children. His output slowed in later years as he turned to conducting and his later works return to the more austere style of his music of the early 1930s. He was, throughout his career, a staunch supporter of American music and composers, promoting them through his lectures, books, performances and festival and concert programming.

Musical influences

The main influences on Copland's music stem from his formative years in Paris. In musical circles at that time there was a reaction against Germanic music (particularly Wagner, Strauss and Mahler) and support for Neoclassicism, a clearer, simpler type of music that looked back to composers of the Baroque and Classical periods. Stravinsky was a great influence, particularly on Copland's rhythmic experimentation, but also in his harmony, orchestration and use of folk material. Milhaud's experiments in polytonality were another influence, as were jazz and the atonal and serial music of the composers of the Second Viennese School, particularly Schoenberg. Back in America, Copland also developed an interest in folk song: not only the Mexican tunes of *El Salón México*, but cowboy melodies and American folk music that he integrated into his 'American' ballets.

EL SALÓN MÉXICO – BACKGROUND

In 1932, Copland went to Mexico to visit his friend the Mexican composer and conductor Carlos Chávez (1899–1978). Chávez took Copland to El Salón México, a rather wild dance hall in Mexico City. A guidebook from the time describes it as follows:

'Harlem-type night-club for the peepul, grand Cuban orchestra, Salon Mexico. Three halls: one for people dressed in your way, one for people dressed in overalls but shod, and one for the barefoot.'

Copland was struck by the earthy quality of it, such as the sign saying 'Please don't throw lighted cigarette butts on the floor so the ladies don't burn their feet', and later wrote: 'My thoughts kept returning to that dance hall. It wasn't so much the music or the dances that attracted me as the spirit of the place. In some inexplicable way, while milling about in those crowded halls, I had felt a live contact with the Mexican "people"... their humanity, their shyness, their dignity and unique charm.' (Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland, Volume 1: 1900–1942*, page 245.)

He decided to compose a piece with the dance hall's name as its title, basing it on Mexican melodies. Copland used Mexican folk melodies that he found in two collections of folk music: Francis Toor's *Cancionero Mexicano* and Ruben M. Campos' *El Folk-lore y la música Mexicana*. The music for *El Salón México* was completed in 1934, but it was not until 1936 that Copland finished the orchestration. The world premiere took place on 27 August 1937, with Chávez conducting the Orquesta Sinfónica de Mexico in Mexico City. It was received warmly, with one reviewer stating it was 'as Mexican as the music of Revueltas'.

It was subsequently performed at a 1938 ISCM concert in London, and Boosey and Hawkes published it later that year. One year on, it had already been played by 21 orchestras, and it has remained in the standard repertoire ever since. As well as the orchestral version, there are versions for piano duet and solo piano, both arranged by a young Leonard Bernstein.

Mexican folk-music in *El Salón México*

The strongest Mexican influence in *El Salón México* is the **Mexican melodies** that Copland borrowed: *El Palo verde*, *La Jesusita* and *El Mosco*. The alternation between $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ that these melodies contain is typical of Mexican folk music, and Copland, being fascinated by these types of rhythms anyway, further developed this sort of metrical contrast in the work.

LISTENING RESOURCES

- *El Palo verde* can be heard on [Spotify](#) or on YouTube [here](#) or [here](#)
- *La Jesusita* can be heard on [Spotify](#) (this only loosely follows the melody that Copland used, and is in a mixture of $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$).

The only Mexican instrument he actually uses is the gourd (also called a *güiro*), though Copland's inclusion of solos for the high E♭ clarinet was designed to imitate the piercing sound of a Mexican clarinetist. The **typical instruments** of the 'Grand Cuban Orchestra' referred to in Copland's guidebook were clarinet, cornet, trombone, bassoon, tuba, piano, güiro (or gourd), *timbal* (derived from the drums of Spanish military bands) and perhaps flute, string bass and violins. All of these instruments have prominent parts in *El Salón México*, the cornet being mimicked by the use of a trumpet and the timbal by various drums.



In fact, the work is subtitled 'Popular Type Dance Hall in Mexico City'.

Revueltas was the Mexican composer of the time thought to have best created an authentic Mexican style.

Some of these instruments are also typical of Mexican *banda* music, of which clips can be viewed on YouTube, for example [here](#).

Activity

Ask students to listen to the opening 34 bars of *El Salón México* and comment on anything that sounds crude or raucous.

Orchestration is discussed in more detail later on.

Students may need to spend some time copying bar numbers into their scores, as this article will refer to bar numbers.

A general characteristic of Mexican folk music is its raucous, home-made quality. Copland imitates this at times in his orchestration, with frequent use of open strings in the violins and violas,

effects such as hand-stopping on the horn and rhythms on percussion instruments such as woodblock, temple blocks, tabor and gourd. The passage from bars 19–33 sounds particularly home-made: the major/minor 3rds in the bassoon and trombone accompaniment suggests an out-of-tune quality, while its lurching rhythm perhaps suggests drunkenness. The trumpet solo in this passage is marked 'ad lib.' and is often played crudely in performance, with a wide vibrato, imitating the sound of a cornet and the style of Mexican brass-playing.

Copland greatly admired **the music of Carlos Chávez**, especially the way in which it integrates Mexican influences into a classical idiom, writing: 'I feel that no other composer ... has succeeded so well in using folk material in its pure form while also solving the problem of its complete amalgamation into an art form.' (Aaron Copland, *The New Music* 1900–60, page 148). Copland seems to have adopted a similar approach in *El Salón México*, aiming to integrate the Mexican elements into a 20th-century classical idiom, rather than striving for authenticity.

OVERALL FORM

El Salón México can be analysed in various ways, and what follows is by no means the definitive description. The piece is a succession of interlinked sections based on different melodies, encompassing a variety of tempi, keys and changes of metre. Although there are clear structural divides between some sections, others flow into each other without a break.

Here is an overview of the main sections, defined by the main changes of tempo:

Bar numbers	Section
1–18	Introduction (Allegro vivace)
19–102	Section 1 (Moderato rubato)
103–182	Section 2 (Allegro vivace) – this develops the material of the introduction
183–243	Section 3 (Moderato molto) – this is often described as being a sort of 'siesta': a rest from the frenetic fast music
243–390	Section 4 (faster) – a rocking idea is introduced, interspersed with other melodies; this leads into a reworking of section 2 (324–390), which could be thought of as a separate section in its own right. This leads into the...
391–402	...Coda, which reworks the material of the introduction

MELODY

As stated before, Copland based the melodies of *El Salón México* on Mexican folk melodies that he found in two collections of folk music: Francis Toor's *Cancionero Mexicano* and Ruben M. Campos' *El Folk-lore y la música Mexicana*. He decided against using the melodies in their original form, as:

'Most composers have found that there is little that can be done with such material except repeat it. In *El Salón México* I decided to use a modified potpourri in which the Mexican themes or fragments and extensions thereof are sometimes inextricably mixed.' (Copland, *Volume 1: 1900–1942* by Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, page 246).

So, when examining the melodies in *El Salón México*, it is not just a straightforward question of labelling which melodies are used where. The melodies Copland creates are often constructed from short fragments taken from two or more melodies, supplemented with extra material of his own.

First, let's look at the original Mexican themes and see how Copland approaches them.

El Palo verde

First strain

Se - no - ra, su - pa - lo ver - de, ya se l'es - ta - ba se - can - do

Second strain

A mí no me an - de con es - as co - sas diab - lo de vie - jo tan im - pru - den - te

An important idea from this is the three quavers (**motif v**) followed by repeated notes in $\frac{3}{4}$. Copland adapts the rhythm of the $\frac{3}{4}$ repeated notes to fit $\frac{8}{8}$, $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{8}$ metres. The $\frac{8}{8}$ rhythm embedded in the melody (**motif w**) is frequently used in the faster sections, where it is repeated, developed and its pitches changed to build longer lines.

La Jesusita – first phrase

va - mos al bai - le y ve - rás que bo - ni - to

Particularly important here is the descending 3rd of the fourth bar (**motif x**): many phrases in *El Salón México* end this way (for instance bars 19 and 172), with motif z (see below) becoming a sort of cadential figure. Its descending shape also forms the basis of the rocking idea that is first heard in the violins at 243–256 and the clarinet melody at bars 269–273. A rising and falling broken-chord pattern (**motif y**) is another important idea, used for example in bars 212–217.

El Mosco

First strain

No te pro - di - gues en dar por - que a - qui, co - mo en cu - qui - o

Second strain

Tri - gue - na ven me a ras - car, me pi - co un mos - co en el ri - o

This shares with *La Jesusita* the descending 3rd at the end of its phrases (**motif x**). The descending pattern from G down to A in its second strain (**motif z**) is also picked up by Copland, for example in the cor anglais in 258–260, the trumpet in 260–261 and the oboe, cor anglais and trumpet in 285–287.

There is a fourth melody that Copland refers to – *La Malacate*. This may be the theme in the table on page 16, labelled 'new theme'.

The table at the end of the article gives a complete melodic analysis of *El Salón México*. It is very complex, and open to interpretation, so students will not need to know it in detail, but it is good for them to be able to refer to places where each of the three main melodies are heard, and to be able to give examples of Copland's practice of combining and developing fragments from different melodies to create new ones.

RHYTHM

Rhythm is frequently the most striking aspect of Copland's music, and in *El Salón México* it is used with extreme sophistication. Copland's study of jazz in the 1920s, and his discovery of the music of Stravinsky and Bartók in his Paris years, had awoken him to a new world of rhythmic possibilities, and he lost no time in exploiting these in his early works.

Copland's use of rhythm in *El Salón México* is complex as he uses several different types of rhythmic device. The easiest way to examine the rhythm in the work is to go through each of these devices individually. None is used for sustained periods: Copland keeps the music fresh by constantly switching from one rhythmic device to another. The music therefore contains a bewildering succession of metrical changes, changing divisions within the bar, much use of syncopations, tied notes, and polyrhythmic passages. At the heart of all of these is the basic interplay between groups of note values lasting two and three quavers.

Two versus three

The two-versus-three relationship can be seen from the opening bars of the score. For 'two', think of a rhythmic unit of two quavers, and for 'three', imagine a unit of three quavers. So a 'two' could be a crotchet or two quavers; and a 'three' could be a dotted crotchet, a crotchet plus a quaver (or quaver plus crotchet), or a group of three quavers.

Breaking down the rhythms of the opening in twos and threes produces:

Bars 1–4	3+3+3+3+2+2+3
Bar 5	2+4 (or 2+2+2)
Bar 6	3+2+3
Bar 7–9	3+3+2+3+2+2+3
Bars 10–11	3+3+2+2+2
Bars 12–15	2+2+3+2+2+3+2+3+2+3

(Give students the pattern for bars 1–4, and ask them to work out the pattern for bars 5, 6, 7–9, 10–11 and 12–15.)

So in these opening bars, the pattern of rhythmic groups of two and three quavers is irregular and unpredictable. This basic unpredictability is sustained through the piece, although there are also some passages in regular metres to counteract this.

The vast majority of note values used in the piece are quavers and crotchets arranged into groups of two or three quavers, like these. Dotted crotchets are less common, while longer note values in sustained accompaniments and occasional groups of semiquavers are comparatively rare. This domination of two note values would quickly become boring in music that used an unchanging beat pattern, but because Copland injects such unpredictability into the rhythm through the changing two-versus-three relationship, it takes on a compelling, springy quality. Copland is particularly indebted to Stravinsky (especially the rhythms in *The Rite of Spring* and *The Soldier's Tale*), and Bartók (for instance the *Six Dances in a Bulgarian Rhythm*) for the inspiration for these types of rhythm.

Writing in 1939, it is clear that this division into twos and threes was something with which Copland was particularly preoccupied:

'Modern composers had the not unnatural idea of breaking the quarters [crotchets] into an unequal distribution of eighth notes [quavers]... The number of eighths remains the same, but their arrangement is no longer 2-2-2-2 but 3-2-3 or 2-3-3 or 3-3-2. Continuing this principle, composers soon were writing similar rhythms outside the bar line, making their rhythms look like this on the page: 2-3-3-2-4-3-2 etc.'

(Aaron Copland, *What to Listen for in Music*, revised edition, 1957, page 43.)

Additive rhythms

An alternative way of explaining rhythms in changing metres is additive rhythms. This means that a composer has adapted a rhythmic pattern in a regular metre, extending certain note values, inserting extra note values, and reducing and removing others, to create unpredictable-sounding rhythms with an irregular pattern of stresses.

It could be said that Copland has transformed the rhythms of the folk-song material into rhythms with irregular stresses, through the use of additive rhythms:

The first phrase of *El Mosco*



Copland's version of the same theme in bars 40–43 of *El Salón México*



+ indicates an extended or added note value

Syncopations

There are numerous syncopations marked in the score of *El Salón México*, as well as ties over the barline. Note that some of these arise because, for ease of performance, Copland has chosen to notate rhythms that could be written out in changing metres (such as different combinations of $\frac{2}{8}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{2}$) in unchanging ones, such as the $\frac{4}{4}$ passage from 120–142. This practice results in frequent syncopations and ties over the barline that would not otherwise be there. There are many genuine syncopations, however, such as in bars 16–17, 27–31, 40–58 and throughout the faster sections.

In Leonard Bernstein's version of the piece for solo piano, he rewrites much of the music originally notated in regular metres in changing metres. This was a common debate at the time: various people had tried rewriting the 'Danse sacrée' from *The Rite of Spring* in $\frac{4}{4}$, as it was thought this would make it easier to perform. However, others preferred the original notation because they believed that it gave the music more life and vitality in performance.

Use of metre

The richness of Copland's rhythmic language in *El Salón México* is especially evident in the variety of ways he uses metre. These are listed below.

1. Regular metres whose beat pattern remains constant (e.g. $\frac{4}{4}$)

For example, $\frac{6}{8}$, bars 73–102 and $\frac{4}{4}$, bars 222–226.

2. A regular pattern consisting of two or more alternating metres (e.g. $\frac{4}{4} + \frac{3}{4}$)

There are two types of rhythms combining groups of two and three. First, there is the consistent use of irregular metres, which however preserve the same beat pattern. So a $\frac{5}{8}$ metre, consisting of two quavers

and then three, is a regular repetition of an irregular metre (providing it is repeated in the same form). The same is true of a $\frac{4}{4}$ metre alternating with a $\frac{3}{4}$ metre.

Ask students to find the following examples of these in *El Salón México* (answers in brackets):

- $\frac{6}{8}$ alternating with $\frac{3}{4}$ (34–39, 59–73)
- $\frac{6}{8} - \frac{3}{4} - \frac{3}{8}$ (145–155, 353–363)
- $\frac{4}{4} - \frac{3}{8}$ (156–161)
- $\frac{4}{4} - \frac{3}{4}$ but written out in $\frac{4}{4}$ (211–217)
- $\frac{6}{8} - \frac{3}{8}$ but written out as $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{8}{8}$ (257–260, 282–287, 305–320)
- $\frac{6}{8} - \frac{3}{8} - \frac{3}{8}$ but written out as $\frac{4}{4} + \frac{3}{8}$ (156–161).

3. An irregular pattern of different metres

For example, bars 380–391: $\frac{5}{8}$; $\frac{4}{4} \times 3$; $\frac{3}{4}$; $\frac{5}{8}$; $\frac{3}{4}$; $\frac{5}{8} \times 3$; $\frac{3}{4}$; $\frac{4}{4}$.

Note that in the orchestral score, Copland writes many irregularly grouped rhythms like this within a $\frac{4}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ metre, using accents and ties. As a result, in many passages the actual metrical patterns are independent of the barline. For instance, in the passage from 324–332, the rhythm is notated in $\frac{4}{4}$ (see example 1a). However, when examined in closer detail, it is actually entirely made up of groupings of two and three quavers, in an irregular pattern (example 1b). An alternative way of notating them would be as in example 1c, in which the strong beats of these groupings coincide with the strong beats of the new bars, effectively removing the syncopations. (Leonard Bernstein, in his solo piano arrangement of *El Salón México*, has rebarred the piece in irregular metres, and has come up with a similar sequence of metres for this section.)

Example 1a

Rhythm in upper strings, bars 326–332



Example 1b

Same rhythm in groups of 2 or 3 quavers



Example 1c

Same rhythm rewritten in changing metres



Polyrhythm

This is the simultaneous superimposition of two or more metres with different beat patterns, such as $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ or $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$. The effect of this is that the relative stresses of these metres shift in and out of sync with each other. It is only used occasionally in *El Salón México*.

- In the passage from bars 200–300, ask students to find two examples of a polyrhythm of $\frac{3}{4}$ against $\frac{6}{8}$. (Answer: 269–273 and 292–296, where the cellos are in $\frac{3}{4}$ and the Eb clarinet has a $\frac{6}{8}$ melody.)

A more complex type of polyrhythm is where one or more of the superimposed rhythms is irregular – for instance, a rhythm in changing metres superimposed on a rhythm in a constant $\frac{4}{4}$ metre.

- Ask students to find an example of a rhythm in changing metre being superimposed on a constant one of $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{3}{8} + \frac{2}{8}$. (Answer: bars 257–260 and 282–287, where the cor anglais (and in the second extract, oboe and later trumpet) has a rhythm in changing metres and the viola has a constant $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{3}{8} + \frac{2}{8}$ pattern; or in 305–320 – strings have a $\frac{3}{8} + \frac{3}{8} + \frac{2}{8}$ pattern, while the high woodwind instruments have rhythms in changing metres: piccolo 305–307, 310–311, 314–315, 319–320.)

Rubato passages and free, cadenza-like passages

While most of the music in *El Salón México* is in a steady tempo, there are occasional freer passages, marked 'rubato' or 'cadenza'. These have the effect of providing a respite from the rhythmic excitement, and as they mostly appear near the beginning (such as at bars 26, 33 and 183–198), they also give the impression of the music progressing from a relatively loose sense of pulse to a clear, tight rhythmic shape.

HARMONY

Having been exposed to contemporary European music during his studies in Paris, Copland had an excellent understanding of the latest harmonic developments. Particularly influential were Stravinsky, Milhaud, Bartók and the music of the Second Viennese School. Having also had a firm grounding in tonal harmony, through his studies with Nadia Boulanger, he integrated many of these new influences into a basically tonal language. In his 'abstract' works of the preceding years (such as *Statements* and *Short Symphony*) he had had a more experimental approach to harmony, with frequent use of polytonality, parallel harmonies, unusual spacings and other devices. In *El Salón México* he returned to a more accessible language, which he felt suited the folk-music influences more and which was consistent with the work's intentionally populist appeal. This language is basically diatonic, but also includes elements of added-note harmony and bitonality. Perhaps the language is more notable for what it does not include: whole-tone passages, chromaticism and atonality. It may have been a conscious decision on Copland's part to avoid these features, which, being synonymous with the sound of serious 'art music', may have worked against his intention to forge a popular style.

Diatonic harmony

Substantial sections of *El Salón México* could be said to use conventional diatonic harmony, although they do contain Copland-esque quirks. The main diatonic passages are the whole of the introduction (bars 1–18), bars 34–102, 183–227, 268–277, 292–300 and 391–end.

What features of the harmony give the music a Copland-esque sound in these passages?

First, there is a great economy in the use of notes. There are frequent unison passages (such as those in the opening section), passages in two parts (such as 217–221), and lines moving in 3rds against a pedal or simple bass line (such as in 40–58, 77–98 and 223–225). Often, the harmony appears simple, or even naive: look at how often a tonic triad (G major) is used in the passage from 69–102 and how the passages from 268–277 and 292–300 use only the tonic and dominant chords. Tonic pedals and tonic-dominant alternations are also used frequently – these two devices are used in alternation in the whole of the section from 59–102.

There is little use of chromaticism in these passages, a rare example being the chromatic inflections in the cello line shadowing the melody in bars 77–86.

Added-note or non-functional harmony

Sometimes called 'wrong-note harmony', this is a particular type of harmonic writing created by Debussy and further developed by Stravinsky, Bartók and Neoclassical composers such as Poulenc, Milhaud and Honegger. It consists of adding extra notes to chords that are not part of the standard triad of root, 3rd and 5th, and which provide colour and are not prepared or resolved. So an added-note chord generally contains the root, 3rd and 5th, plus one or more of a 2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th. Chords can also be constructed without all the notes of a triad being present, for example consisting of tonic, supertonic, subdominant and dominant.

More or less the whole of the sections from 108–171 and 305–390 use added-note harmony.

Which diatonic scales form the basis of the harmony in the following places?

(Answers shown in brackets.)

124–133 beat 2	(C major)	324–334	(A major)
133 beat 3 to 144	(A \flat major)	338 beat 3 to 348	(E \flat major)
145–171	(C major)	353–379	(A major)
305–321	(G major)	380–390	(G major)

Notice that these added-note harmony sections are constructed entirely from the notes of major scales. The only places where this is not the case are in the brief passages where the music is modulating to a new key.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

In the passage from 108–172, find examples of:

- A pair of pedal notes a tone apart. (Answers: G/A in 124–133 beat 2 is the longest; there are shorter instances of G/A at 108–109 and 113–115, and C/D at various points between 145 and 150, but these do not last long enough to really be called pedal notes.)
- A bass line that is dissonant with the harmony above it. (133 beat 3 to 144 and 156–172. This is quite a common device used by composers such as Stravinsky (particularly in his Neoclassical works) and Poulenc. In this example, almost all the notes of the bass line are dissonant with the triad above it.)
- An example of a major triad with an added 2nd. (C major bar 149, bar 155.)
- Block chords moving in near-parallel. (124–133 beat 2.)
- A tonic chord sounded against a bass line outlining a dominant chord. (156–159.)

Major/minor harmony

As its name suggests, this is a type of harmony in which the major and minor 3rd of a triad are sounded simultaneously. It is a device found in blues piano and jazz as well as the music of 20th-century composers such as Stravinsky and Bartók.

In *El Salón México*, the first slow section, from 20–29, contains accompaniment chords in the low wind that between them simultaneously outline the notes of G major and G minor. This may just be to give a brash, 'out of tune' quality to the opening section to establish a Mexican feel. Further moments of major and minor occur in later passages, but these tend to arise through bitonality.

ABSENCE OF CHROMATICISM AND WHOLE-TONE HARMONY

Note that there is very little chromaticism, and only very occasional use in passing of whole-tone chords, such as the modulatory passages in 119–123.

Bitonality

This is the other influence on the harmonic language of *El Salón México*. Copland's interest in this device again stems from the composers whose music he was exposed to in his Paris years – particularly Stravinsky, Bartók and Milhaud. Bitonality is the simultaneous use of two different keys, such as C major and F \sharp major (which Stravinsky used in his 1911 ballet *Petrushka*). Milhaud had particularly taken up this device in his ballet *La Création du Monde* (1923), making a great impression on Copland.

The bitonality in *El Salón México* is relatively understated, not being particularly dissonant.

QUESTIONS

Ask students to look at bars 247–256.

- Which triad is outlined by the cellos’ material in these bars? (Answer: B♭ major first inversion.)
- Which triad is outlined by the violins’ figure in these bars? (G major.)
- Which triad is outlined by the flute and piccolo’s material in these bars? (D major first inversion.)

The harmony of this passage is therefore based on superimposed chords of B♭ major, G major and D major. Notice each triad shares D, so the potentially dissonant effect is lessened.

- Are there any similar bitonal passages later on in the work? (B♭ major and G major appear simultaneously at bars 261–267, 278–281, 288–291 and 301–304.)

You could ask students to try it out on the piano to hear the sound of the chord.

TONALITY

Because of the different types of harmonic language used in *El Salón México*, the tonal scheme of the piece includes sections that are in specific keys, those that are based around tonal centres and those that, because of their bitonality, occupy two tonal centres at the same time.

To give an overview of the tonal scheme, ask students to work out the keys of the following sections (a version with answers can be found at the end of the article):

Bar numbers	Key or tonal centre
1–114	
115–123	
124 to 133 beat 2	
133 beat 3 to 144	
145–171	
172–182	
183–196	
197–208	
209–210	
211–227	
228–239	
240–247	
248–267	
268–277	
278–281	
282–287	
288–291	
292–300	
301–304	
305–322	
322–323	
324–332	
333–337	

Bar numbers	Key or tonal centre
338 beat 3 to 348	
349–352	
353–363	
364–379	
380–390	
391–402	

There are several points to note here:

1. The music passes through every major key with the exception of F major.
2. There are no passages in a minor key.
3. G major is the most important tonal centre in the work, and can be thought of as being the tonic. However, after its initial period of dominance (the opening to bar 114), whenever it returns it is contradicted by other harmonic elements: at 240–247 by the presence of F \sharp s; in the four bitonal passages (248–304), where it is sounded simultaneously against B \flat major; at 305–322, where the bass line implies the key of G but where there is an emphasis on the notes A, C and E elsewhere in the texture; and the ending, where G major is alternated with an E major chord (391–402).
4. The second most important tonal centre, which serves as a kind of dominant, is E major, the key for the opening of the second section 183–196, and which returns at the end (391–402), pitted against G major.
5. C major (the subdominant of G) and A major (the subdominant of E) also appear more than once and are important in the two fast sections.
6. Other keys (A \flat major, D \flat major, D major, F \sharp major, B major, B \flat major and E \flat major) seem to be used for the tonal contrast they provide rather than for structural reasons.
7. Many of the modulations and progressions in the work are tertiary, which helps bring a sense of surprise and freshness to the ensuing passages.

A tertiary modulation is a modulation to a key a major or minor 3rd away.

Ask students to complete the following table of tertiary modulations and progressions (a version with answers can be found at the end of the article).

Bar number	Initial key/tonal centre/ mode	New key/tonal centre/ mode	Interval
130	C (mode)	A \flat major (mode)	Down major 3rd
140–145	A \flat major (mode)		
167–172	C major		
192–199	E major		
209–211	D major		
333–335	A major		
335–340	C major		
347–351	E \flat major		
351–353	F \sharp major		
378–380	A major (mode)		
380–391	C major Lydian (mode)		
391–392	E major		

INSTRUMENTATION, TEXTURE AND TIMBRE

Copland's orchestral writing has a distinctive sound, which in this piece is supplemented by his deliberate use of Mexican influences.

Instruments used

The orchestra is a standard symphony orchestra of piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, cor anglais, clarinet in E \flat , two clarinets in B \flat , bass clarinet in B \flat , two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano and strings. The score has been composed so that the cor anglais, clarinet in E \flat , bass clarinet, contrabassoon and third trumpet are not essential to performance: their parts have been cued into others.

TRANSPOSING INSTRUMENTS

For a chart of which instruments transpose and by how much, go to [this website](#).

Notice the inclusion of a piano. This is common in Copland, for instance in *Rodeo* and the Clarinet Concerto. He was perhaps influenced by Stravinsky's use of the piano in *Petrushka*. The E \flat clarinet is a slightly unusual addition: Copland may have been influenced by the instrument's use in Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. Piccolo, cor anglais (also used as a solo instrument in Copland's *Quiet City*), bass clarinet and contrabassoon are standard additions to the 20th-century symphony orchestra; the omission of a harp in an orchestra of this size is a little unusual.

The percussion writing, especially the use of gourd, temple blocks, woodblock and tabor, hints at Latin-American percussion instruments, and helps instill a Mexican flavour in the piece.

Orchestration

CLARITY

Copland's primary concern is for every part in the texture to be heard clearly throughout the work. This is a feature of Classical and Neoclassical styles of orchestration (particularly that of Stravinsky) and contrasts with orchestration of the Romantic period (such as Richard Strauss), which strives to create a richer, more blended sound made up of many contrasting tone colours. So the vast majority of the material for the orchestra in *El Salón México* is an integral part of the fabric of the music: the melody, countermelody or accompaniment. It tends to avoid Romantic traits such as rushes of scales, washes of sound based on broken-chord figuration, thick scoring such as melodies and accompaniments doubled on numerous instruments at several octaves, and melodramatic effects like string tremolandi.

A good illustration of this difference is in the passage from 73–97. The repeated notes of the accompaniment are played throughout by divisi strings, with their pitches doubled by sustained notes in the horns and upper woodwind; the melody is played on violins and cellos throughout. Together, it forms a fairly simple texture.

You could **ask your students** what they think a Romantic composer might have been tempted to do with the texture at this point. For instance, they might have created a more intricate texture, perhaps with burbling broken chords in harp and woodwind, or rushes of scales in the background, and might have spread the accompaniment harmonies over a wider range. They may also have varied the tone colour of the melody much more.

HOMOGENEITY OF TIMBRE

Copland tends to keep instrumental groups together in his scoring. In other words, if scoring a melody in 3rds, he is most likely to score it for just brass instruments, just wind instruments or just stringed instruments, rather than, say, a flute on the upper part and violins on the lower one. Examples of this are the bassoon and bass clarinet from 40–59, flute and oboe from 197–204, two oboes from 225–234 and muted trumpets from 241–244. When doubling occurs (two different instruments playing the same line), each part in the texture is generally doubled in a consistent way, preserving a unified tone colour.

ANTIPHONY

An important feature of *El Salón México* is Copland's use of antiphony, and his orchestration plays a vital role in distinguishing between different blocks of material.

In the opening bars, an antiphonal dialogue is set up between trumpets/cymbals (on the G major triads) and upper strings, woodwind and piano (on the melody). The resulting differences in tone colour help make the contrast between these two types of material more dramatic. Similar antiphonal dialogues appear in passages such as 133–136 (between bassoons/trombone/timp/cellos/basses and horns/violin II/viola) and 173–181 (upper wind/upper strings/piano and horns/trombones/tuba/cello/double bass).

STRUCTURAL USE OF ORCHESTRATION

In a piece with so many different sections, it is important to define as clearly as possible where new sections begin. Copland's orchestration always includes noticeable changes at these points, such as a change from wind-dominated to string-dominated scoring. Even minor structural points, such as a new phrase, are usually marked by a subtle but noticeable change.

Examples of striking changes are:

- Bar 61, where the wind-dominated scoring gives way to strings
- Bar 103, where a climactic passage for wind, brass and strings gives way to oboes, bassoon and piano
- Bar 124, where woodwind, trumpets, piano and strings give way to horns, woodblock and strings
- Bar 133, where horns/woodblock/strings are followed by bassoons, trumpets, timp, cellos and basses
- Bar 145, where woodwind, trumpets and strings give way to brass and side drum.

Examples of subtle changes are:

- Bar 89, where violin II and cello swap roles, and oboes and cor anglais take over from flutes and clarinet
- Bar 118 beat 3, where oboes are added, doubling violin II and viola, cellos are added, doubling bassoon, and the piano doubles its own part an octave higher
- Bar 214, where violin I takes over the melody from clarinet I
- Bar 263, where the violins' material is doubled by the addition of flutes and piano, and the accompaniment rhythm is reinforced with chinese blocks.

ORCHESTRATION TO REINFORCE DYNAMICS

Copland adds or removes instruments to bring about or enhance changes in dynamics. A good example of an orchestral crescendo occurs in bars 98–102, where first timpani, then clarinets, then trombones, trumpets and flutes are added to the texture to help intensify the crescendo in this passage. The fortissimo dynamic at 137 in the strings is reinforced by the entry of upper wind, while the passage from 151–156 is an amplified version of 145–150, adding wind at a higher octave to the brass. More fully scored versions of this passage can be seen in bars 353–363.

ORCHESTRATION TO HEIGHTEN ARTICULATION

There is frequent use of single notes or short series of notes to 'point' important or accented notes in melodic phrases. This helps clarify the phrase structure (especially the way rhythms are divided into twos and threes) and helps add vitality.

Good examples of this are:

- Bars 1–2, where cymbal reinforces the trumpets' attack
- Bars 3–4, where viola and cello accent the first note of the phrase, and piano, cor anglais and Eb clarinet the end of it
- Bar 19, where strings, brass, snare drum and bass drum reinforce the first quaver of the phrase in horn I and violin I
- Bar 26, where string pizzicato emphasises the entry of the clarinet
- Bars 156–161, where wind, trumpet I, xylophone, cymbal and first violins reinforce the accented notes in the trumpets, violin II and viola
- Bars 173–181, where viola, cello, piano and clarinet reinforce the violin/high wind melody, and brass, cellos and double basses reinforce the first note of the first horn's motif
- Bars 268–273, where double bass reinforces the first beat of each bar, clarinets I and II and bass clarinet the fourth quaver, and horns the fourth quaver of every second bar; bassoons also double the rising quavers in the cellos

- Bar 392, where clarinets and xylophone reinforce certain notes of the melody in the flutes, oboes and upper strings.

OTHER INTERESTING FEATURES

In some homophonic passages, Copland sometimes swaps notes between individual instruments to create more interesting lines.

Ask students to try writing out the upper string parts in bars 62, 64, 66 and 68. What is the point of this technique? (The extra movement can help add life to the overall effect.)

Here are some **examples of interesting colours and techniques**, which students could mark into their scores:

Bar number	Orchestration
19	The combination of violin (open string) and horn (stopped note)
34–50	The alternation of double bass, piano, bassoon, contrabassoon and timpani
40–59	The combination of bassoon and bass clarinet in 3rds
103–105	The combination of oboes, bassoon and piano
147, 150, etc.	The combination of timpani chord and bass drum
206–207	The glissandi in the solo violins (creates an effect reminiscent of Mahler)
217	The combination of E \flat clarinet, bassoon and gourd
252–260	The use of E \flat clarinet and piccolo on the melody line, followed by cor anglais
276	The use of a glissando on an E \flat clarinet
372–379	The violin II and viola parts, in which Copland uses the open A string to create parts with wide leaps

TEXTURES EXERCISE

There is a wide range of textures in *El Salón México*. Ask students to find examples of the following (the list of answers is not exhaustive):

- Monophonic (the clarinet solo in 185–189)
- Homophonic (145–155, 333–352 (though there are occasional held notes in this passage))
- Antiphonal (1–9, 391–402)
- Contrapuntal (136–144, 165–171 and similar)
- A layered texture incorporating an ostinato (247–256 and similar passages, 305–323)
- Melody and accompaniment (76–99, 211–225, 268–277, 292–300).

IB PRACTICE QUESTIONS

As this exam has not been set before, the IBO has not yet provided any practice questions. Here are some suggestions, based on the sample questions provided by the IBO for previous set works:

1. Demonstrate and discuss how successful Copland was in reconciling 20th-century harmonic developments with tonal conventions of the past in *El Salón México*.
2. Identify three rhythmic techniques that originate in the 20th century. Demonstrate and discuss how these techniques contribute to the overall style and the musical argument of *El Salón México*.
3. *El Salón México* represents a change of style for Copland away from a more modernist idiom towards a more accessible, traditional musical language. Demonstrate and discuss how effectively he reconciled the conflicting ideals of modernity and tradition in *El Salón México*.
4. Identify two features of the music that have roots in Mexican folk music and two that originate from other cultures. Demonstrate and discuss how these musical elements contribute to the work's overall style.
5. Demonstrate and discuss how the orchestration of *El Salón México* contributes to clarifying the structure of the work and establishing its character.

6. Comparison question – Symphony No. 41, K.551, ‘Jupiter’ (Mozart) and *El Salón México* (Copland): Investigate significant musical links between these two pieces by analysing and comparing and contrasting one of their:
- Tone colour/timbre and melody
 - Handling of harmony and tonality
 - Handling of rhythm and phrasing
 - Handling of structure.

SUMMARY

Copland's *El Salón México* represents something of a paradox: a work with a deceptively simple, attractive appearance, but which is also subtle and complex once you delve beneath the surface. Any study of this work should acknowledge these two levels: both are essential to the piece's enduring success. This article has gone into considerable detail on melody, rhythm, harmony and orchestration and it is likely that students will not need to retain every detail given above for the exam. However, it is necessary for them to understand the compositional principles behind *El Salón México* and these can only be explained by carrying out a detailed analysis such as the one above.

RESOURCES

SCORES

- Orchestral score of *El Salón México* ISMN: 9790060110214 (Boosey and Hawkes *Masterworks* series: contains several other orchestral works) or ISMN: 9790051200498 (Boosey and Hawkes pocket score)
- Solo piano version of *El Salón México* by Bernstein ISMN: 9790051280247 (Boosey and Hawkes – useful for harmonic and rhythmic analysis and of interest to good pianists).

RECORDINGS

- There are many available, including some by Copland himself, and by Bernstein.

BOOKS AND LETTERS

- *Copland, Volume 1: 1900–1942* by Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis (Faber and Faber 1984, ISBN 978-0571133802) – thorough background on Copland's life up to 1942, including seven pages of background information on *El Salón México*
- *The Music of Aaron Copland* by Neil Butterworth (Toccata 1985, ISBN 978-0907689089) – contains information and analyses on all of Copland's major works, including two pages on *El Salón México*
- Letters from Copland to Carlos Chávez, Nadia Boulanger and Serge Koussevitsky on *El Salón México* are available [here](#).

MELODIC ANALYSIS TABLE

TIPS

The most obvious uses of the folksong material are highlighted in bold.

Notice how the fast sections (including the introduction) are mostly based on material from *El Palo verde* and the slower ones on *La Jesusita* and *El Mosco*.

It may be helpful to copy out the first few bars of the themes labeled A–J, A1, etc. onto a large sheet of manuscript paper, so that the melodic structure can be understood more clearly.

Bar nos.	Instrument(s)	Theme	Theme(s) used	Comments	Section
1–14	Violins	A	EPV (1st strain)	Rhythm is altered	Introduction (Allegro vivace)
19	Violin 1	x	Motif x	Used to end the phrase	
23–33	Trumpet 1	B	LJ	LJ is embellished with trills and with notes changed	Section 1 (Moderato rubato)
40–59	Bassoon 1	C	EM	Rhythm changed from $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{4}{4}$ metre	
61–69	Violins, viola	D	EPV (2nd strain)	First three quavers of each phrase changed	
76–102	Violin 1	C1	EM	Pitches changed slightly	
103–123	Oboes, flutes, trumpets, bassoons	A; A1	EPV (1st strain), LJ and EM (motif z)	Uses v and w from EPV (e.g. bar 103), descending arpeggio from EM (e.g. 105) and descending line from EM (motif z) (e.g. 108–109)	Section 2 (Allegro vivace)
124–133	Strings	A3	Motif w (from EPV)	Melodic line derived from rhythm of motif w	
134–144	Flute 1, trumpets, strings	A1	EPV (1st strain), LJ and EM	Similar to 103–123	
145–155	Trumpets, flutes	D2	EPV (2nd strain)	Rhythm is altered through insertion of $\frac{3}{8}$ bars	
156–164	Trumpets	A2	EPV (2nd strain)	Derived from rhythm of first two bars of EPV	
165–171	Upper strings	A1	EPV (1st strain)	Derived from rhythm; pitches changed; similar to 103–123 and 134–144	
172–182	Trumpet 1, horn 1 in antiphony with upper strings/fl/clarinets	A; motif x	Motif x and EPV (1st strain)	The two ideas are alternated	
183–196	Clarinet 1	E; motif z	EM (motif z)	Loosely follows the shape of EM	Section 3 (Moderato molto rubato)
197–210	Oboe 1	F	New waltz theme (F)	Not related to EPV, LJ or EM: may possibly be <i>La Malacate</i>	

Bar nos.	Instrument(s)	Theme	Theme(s) used	Comments	Section
211–217	Clarinet 1, vn 1	B1	LJ	Based around shape of LJ (motif y)	
217–221	E♭ clarinet	B2	LJ	Loosely based around shape of LJ; descending 3rds from motif x?	
222–225	Violin 1	B3	LJ	Loosely based around harmonies of LJ	
226–243	Oboes, clarinets, flutes, trumpets; solo violins	F; motif x	Waltz theme (F); also motif x	Mirrors 197–210, but with a ‘rocking’ idea based around motif x on solo violins developing into the idea that dominates the next section	
247–256	Violins; piccolo/E♭ clarinet	G	Rocking idea (based on x); EM (motif z)	The piccolo melody follows the shape of bars 2–3 of EM (2nd strain)	Section 4 (Più mosso)
257–261	Cor anglais, trumpet	H	New melody (H) based on LJ and EM (motif z)	The first half of the phrase has similarities to LJ; the end of the phrase is similar to EM (2nd strain) bars 3–4	
261–267	Violins	G	Rocking idea (x)		
269–277	E♭ clarinet	J	Another new melody (J) based on LJ and x	Loosely based on LJ; x is emphasised through repetition	
278–291	Violins; oboes, trumpet	G; H	Rocking idea (x) alternating with new melody 1	282–291 mirrors 257–267	
292–304	E♭ clarinet and oboes; violins	J; G	J, based on LJ and x; rocking idea at 301–304	Mirrors 269–277	
304–322	Upper wind and trumpets	H1	H; elements from EPV	The rhythmic shape of H is preserved, with the three quavers from EPV being incorporated	
326–332	Violins, brass, upper wind	A1	EPV (1st strain), LJ and EM	Similar to 134–144	Section 4 cont. (reworking of section 2)
333–336	Violins, clarinets	A	EPV (1st strain)	Similar to 113–116	
337–352	Violins, high wind, trumpets	A; A1	EPV (1st strain), LJ and EM	Similar to 103–118	
353–363	Strings, wind, brass	D2	EPV (2nd strain)	Similar to 145–155	
364–379	Tutti	A2	EPV (1st and 2nd strains)	Similar to 156–171	
380–402	Tutti	A	EPV (1st strain)	Similar to 1–9	Coda (mirrors introduction)

TONALITY TABLE: ANSWERS

The bold entries refer to sections in, or centred around, G major and E major.

Bar numbers	Key or tonal centre
1–114	G major
115–123	Modulates via B \flat major
124–133 beat 2	Mode: notes of C major scale
133 beat 3 to 144	(A \flat major): notes of A \flat major scale
145–171	C major; notes of C major scale
172–182	A major (but with D \sharp s)
183–196	E major
197–208	D \flat major
209–210	D major
211–227	F \sharp major
228–239	F \sharp major mode; C \sharp major and F \sharp major sounded at same time
240–247	C major mode; G major ⁷ third inversion
248–267	Bitonal: B \flat major/ G major
268–277	B major
278–281	Bitonal: B \flat major/ G major
282–287	B \flat major, but notes of E \flat major scale
288–291	Bitonal: B \flat major/ G major
292–300	B major
301–304	Bitonal: B \flat major/ G major
305–322	Notes of G major scale ; harmony ambiguous: bass line suggests G major, but A, C and E are emphasised elsewhere in the texture
322–323	Modulates
324–332	Notes of A major scale; bass line outlines E major
333–337	A major, then modulates via C major
338 beat 3 to 348	E \flat major
349–352	Modulates via G \flat major
353–363	A major
364–379	Notes of A major scale
380–390	C major, with sharpened 4ths
391–402	E major alternating with G major

MODULATION TABLE: ANSWERS

Bar number	Initial key/tonal centre/ mode	New key/tonal centre/ mode	Interval
130	C (mode)	A \flat major (mode)	Down major 3rd
140–145	A \flat major (mode)	C major	Up major 3rd
167–172	C major	A major	Down minor 3rd
192–199	E major	D \flat major	Down augmented 2nd
209–211	D major	F \sharp major	Up maj or 3rd
333–335	A major	C major	Up minor 3rd
335–340	C major	E \flat major	Up minor 3rd
347–351	E \flat major	F \sharp major	Up augmented 2nd
351–353	F \sharp major	A major	Up minor 3rd
378–380	A major (mode)	C major Lydian (mode)	Up minor 3rd
380–391	C major Lydian (mode)	E major	Up major 3rd
391–392	E major	G major	Up minor 3rd