

Program Notes

Grand Canyon Suite (1931).....Ferde Grofé

This is our music you hear, surging forth, singing up to every one of us.

~~ Ferde Grofé on his *Grand Canyon Suite*

Ferdinand Rudolf von Grofé was born in New York City on March 27, 1892. Like George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, Grofé was an American original. Grofé's talent was in great demand in jazz, classical, and popular music circles from the early 1920s until his death in 1972. Though classically trained, the lure of popular music brought him to the Paul Whiteman Orchestra, where he was acclaimed for his orchestration of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Now audiences took notice of Grofé's own music, beginning with *Broadway at Night* and *Metropolis* and expanding to encompass all of America with images of the Mississippi River, Death Valley, Niagara Falls (all suites), and most of all the Grand Canyon. While other American icons followed, among them the *Hollywood* and *Tabloid Suites*, *Knute Rockne*, and *Henry Ford*, Grofé will always be remembered for the *Grand Canyon Suite*.

Notes published along with the score suggest an interpretation of the work's five programmatic moments. Although they are not Grofé's words, few can argue with their portrayal of the music. **Sunrise:** "Early morning on the desert. The sun rises slowly, spattering the darkness with the rich colors of dawn . . . from beyond the horizon a brilliant spray of colors announces the full break of day." **Painted Desert:** "The desert is silent and mysterious, yet beautiful. As the bright rays of the sun are reflected against majestic crags and spread across the sands in varying hues, the entire scene appears as a canvas thick with the pigments of nature's own blending."

On the Trail: "A traveler and his burro are descending the trail. The sharp hoof beats of the animal form an unusual rhythmic background for the cowboy's song. The sounds of a waterfall tells them of a nearby oasis. A lone cabin is sighted, and as they near it a music box it heard. The traveler stops at the cabin for refreshment. Now fully rested, the traveler journeys forth at a livelier pace. The movement ends as man and burro disappear in the distance." **Sunset:** "Now the shades of night sweep over the golden hues of day. As evening envelops the desert in a cloak of darkness, there is a suggestion of animal calls coming from the distant rim of the canyon." **Cloudburst:** "We hear the approach of the storm. Lightning flashes across the sky and thunder roars from the darkness. The torrent of rain reaches its height in a cloudburst, but the storm disappears rapidly and the moon comes from behind clouds. Nature again rejoices in all its grandeur."

The *Grand Canyon Suite* was premiered on November 22, 1931 at the Studebaker Theater in Chicago by the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

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