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**Charles and Jane Stringfellow** 



# Virginia Chamber Orchestra

Delighting audiences across Virginia for over a quarter of a century, the Virginia Chamber Orchestra features 40 of the finest professional musicians in the Washington metropolitan area. Critics praise the orchestra's "rich, full sound," "sparkle," "wit," and "virtuostic flair."

#### Maestro Luis Haza

Maestro Haza, music director of the American Youth Philharmonic, was invited to return as guest conductor for *Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America*. He previously conducted the Virginia Chamber Orchestra in the highly successful Electronic Field Trip, *The Musical Side of Thomas Jefferson* in 1998. Mr. Haza conducts professional orchestras on both sides of the Atlantic and is a member of the first violin section of the National Symphony Orchestra.

# **Ted Libbey**

Mr. Libbey is well known in music circles for his classical music commentary on National Public Radio (NPR). He has served as a music critic for both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Star*. Among the books he has authored is *The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection*. He shares with Maestro Haza an ability to involve young people in the joy of classical music.

## Francis H. Dillon, III

Mr. Dillon, who holds degrees in history and geography, is currently a doctoral candidate in Education at George Mason University, where he teaches a course in geography for teachers. He also serves as an advisor to social studies curriculum specialists in Fairfax County Public Schools and is a frequent guest speaker at workshops and seminars.



# **Musical Examples**

Music performed by the Virginia Chamber Orchestra on Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America is indicated in bold face type. The work from which each example has been taken is indicated in regular typeface. You are encouraged to listen to the entire composition, either before or after the broadcast, to enhance your appreciation and understanding of the music and its relationship to geography.

Grofé, *Grand Canyon Suite*—Southwest Region

- I. Sunrise
- II. Painted Desert (excerpt)
- III. On the Trail (excerpt)
- IV. Sunset
- V. Cloudburst

Hovhaness, *Mount St. Helens Symphony*—Northwest Region

- I. Prelude and Fugue
- II. Spirit Lake
- III. Volcano (excerpt)

Grofé, Mississippi Region

- I. Father of the Waters
- II. Huckleberry Finn
- III. Old Creole Days
- IV. Mardi Gras

Still, From the Black Belt—Southeast Region

- I. Li'l Scamp
- II. Honeysuckle
- III. Dance
- IV. Mah Bones Is Creakin
- V. Blue
- VI. **Brown Girl** (excerpt)
- VII. Clap Yo' Han's

Copland, Appalachian Spring (excerpt)— Northeast Region

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# Introduction to Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America

We are all geographers, from an astronaut gazing down on planet Earth to a baby first opening his eyes to assess his immediate surroundings. Geographers study the physical Earth, its human residents, and the connections between the two. This vast and fascinating subject includes the present, the past, and predictions of future outcomes as well.

We create maps and other devices to understand the spatial aspects of the world. The first places people usually search to obtain geographical information are a textbook, an atlas, and an almanac. These sources of description, maps, and statistical information are necessary for geographic literacy. Yet, some of the best geography is not found in a textbook. The richness of geography that leads to long-term understanding is enhanced by what we receive through our senses, and by our emotional responses to a geographic feature. Certainly, the study of the Grand Canyon would not be complete without the sensory images we experience and absorb into our being.

The Virginia Chamber Orchestra takes you on a journey to five regions of the United States. A region can be anything you want it to be. People create regions to help them interpret, analyze, and make sense of an area on the globe. The five regions on the excursion are at, or near, the four "corners" of the United States—the Northeast, the Southeast, the Northwest and the Southwest, plus the Mississippi. A musical selection focuses on an important place in each of these regions.

#### The Southwest

Our journey begins in the Southwest, an area of mountains, plateaus, and deserts. Because it has a desert climate at its lower elevations, agricultural activity relies on irrigation. The Colorado and Rio Grand are important rivers. The 1,450-mile long Colorado flows from the Rocky Mountains in Colorado to Mexico—by way of the Grand Canyon.

The Grand Canyon National Park, our first musical stopping place, began as an ancient plateau containing a variety of layers of rock. The Colorado River cut through the plateau, working its way down, deepening and broadening its channel and ultimately creating one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The magnificent colors of the rocks are determined by rock types and by the changing angle of the sun as it shines on them.

The canyon consists of desert at its lower elevations with cliffs, hills, and forests nearer the canyon's northern and southern rims, which are connected by a trail.

Ferde Grofé (1892–1972) was inspired to write the *Grand Canyon Suite* after vacationing there, explaining that "the richness of the land and the rugged optimism of the people had fired my imagination." Instrumental colors are important to a composer when creating mental images. (See the section on orchestration, page 12). Grofé spoke about "all the colors I needed to describe my tremendous subject in musical terms."



His "Painted Desert" and "On the Trail" movements both have what geographers call "a sense of place." To describe the mules people ride along the trails, Grofé creates some of the most specific musical images you will hear in this program. The temple blocks imitate the hooves of the mules as they clomp along the trail, and the "hee haw" motif in the clarinet mimics their braying sound; no other interpretation seems possible. By contrast, in "Painted Desert," from the first delicate notes of the harp one pictures a beautiful, spacious area, but each person who hears this movement may think of a different set of words to describe the scene that is its subject. In "On the Trail," the mule motifs are unmistakable—no other interpretation seems possible. "Painted Desert," however, contains musical suggestions, but any specifics are left to the listener's imagination.

#### The Northwest

Fish and forests are two of the most important resources in the Northwest, which is generally classified as including the states of Washington, Oregon, and northern California. The early airplane industry got its start here because of the rich production of lumber. Agriculture thrives in the Wilamette Valley and in the lowlands of Puget Sound. The Columbia River provides irrigation water for the drier eastern interiors.

The Coastal Ranges and the Cascade Mountains are the major land features. Mount St. Helens is part of the Cascades, a volcanic mountain range situated on the eastern edge of the Pacific Ring of Fire. The Ring of Fire is a geologically active area, which encircles the Pacific Ocean.

Mount St. Helens erupted on May 18, 1980, blowing away more than 1,000 feet of the mountain and killing 34 people. It was heard more than 135 miles away and had a force 500 times as powerful as the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. The volcano had been inactive since 1857, and humans had coexisted in peaceful harmony with the dormant volcano.

Alan Hovhaness, who wrote *Mount St. Helens Symphony*, actually lived in the area and experienced the eruption. The symphony's last movement, "Volcano," depicts the eruption with heavy percussion and solo trombone. In actuality, the eruption consisted of magma

rising to the surface, blowing steam, ash, rocks, and debris into the air. Huge stands of trees were reduced to toothpicks.

The peaceful beginning of the "Volcano" movement is described by the composer as a "dawn-like hymn." It typifies the feelings of many people living in an area of natural hazards. The volcano's relative inactivity, in terms of human life span, produced a false sense of security and a feeling of harmony with nature. Although there were geological foretellings of imminent disaster, residents were literally blasted into the reality of nature's dynamism. In his music, Hovhaness captured both the feeling of harmony with nature and the unexpected, raw violence.



# The Mississippi Region

The Mississippi River is the most important geographical feature of the Midwest, a broad expanse of land located in the interior of the United States. Prominent features include the Central and Great Plains, and the southern states near its mouth. The Mississippi drains half of the United States, and the Missouri, Illinois, Arkansas, Red, and Tennessee Rivers are its major tributaries. It has the third largest drainage area of all the world's rivers.

It begins as a rather narrow river at its upper elevations, becomes larger when joined by the Missouri, and meets the Ohio at Cairo, Illinois, where it doubles in volume. It continues to broaden and slow down as it approaches the Gulf Coastal Plain. Its muddiness is the result of erosion of dirt, particularly from the northern areas near its source. That mud is finally emptied into the Gulf of Mexico, forming a deposit called a delta. New Orleans is the major city on that delta. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers often has to dredge out channels in the delta to allow oceangoing ships to navigate the river.

The Mississippi River flows 2,348 miles from its source in Minnesota to its mouth. It transports agricultural and industrial products as well as raw materials on its barges. It carries approximately 40 percent of all the freight that is transported on inland waterways.

"Father of the Waters" is the first movement of Ferde Grofé's *Mississippi Suite*. In only a few moments of music an image of the river is conveyed by a broad French horn solo,

over an underlying suggestion of water in motion (another example of inspiration from physical geography). Then a lively Indian dance shifts the focus to the human activity along that river's banks (the inspiration of cultural geography). Although time does not permit including movements II, III, and IV in the Field Trip performance, cultural geography continues to be their focus.

It was the Ojibway of northern Minnesota, near the river's source, who gave it the name "Messipi," so it is fitting that the Indian dance is heard in the first movement. The entire Mississippi Suite not only transports the listener back in time, when the Indians were the earliest settlers, but also reminds the listener of the river's flow from north to south, since its final movement, "Mardi Gras," pays a musical visit to New Orleans. Along the way, the second movement is a high spirited and humorous character sketch of Huckleberry Finn, the subject of Mark Twain's novel, "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." The "adventures" refer to Huck's long raft trip on the Mississippi and the variety of people he meets along the way. This is followed by "Old Creole Days," probably referring to early French settlers, particularly in Louisiana, and their descendants.

## The Southeast

The Southeast region generally comprises the area of the Unites States sweeping from Virginia, along the Atlantic Coast to east Texas on the Gulf of Mexico. Historically we know it as the former Confederate States of America. Once a major cotton-producing



region, the Southeast region now produces soybeans and other agricultural products, and the cotton-producing areas have moved farther west. The Southeast produces most of the fresh fruits and vegetables consumed in the United States as well as peanuts, rice and sugar cane. The quickly renewable pine forests support a large timber industry, and oil and petrochemical plants are found along the Gulf Coast.

The Black Belt of Alabama and Georgia takes its name from the rich, black soil fed by decaying limestone underneath. Many of the wealthiest southern plantations of the Civil War days lay in the Black Belt. Culturally, the Black Belt includes South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

The large concentration of African American people in this area, and the jazz and blues music that was such an important part of their cultural life, inspired William Grant Still's suite, From the Black Belt. Still described "Li'l Scamp," meaning little rascal, by composing what could be called a musical prank. Since it is only eight measures long, the sudden ending takes the first-time listener by surprise. "Brown Girl," by contrast, is a serene and lovely musical portrait. The composer's notes for "Clap Yo' Han's" tell us that "adults join in a children's dancing game." He tells us that the movements in this suite were written "frankly to amuse and please those who listen to them," but he also worked in larger, more "serious" forms.

William Grant Still (1895–1978) was a man of many "firsts." He was the first African American composer to have a symphony performed by an American orchestra, the first African American to conduct a major symphony orchestra, and the first African American to have an opera performed by a major opera company. Still traveled to a number of different areas and worked in many styles of music. He went to Memphis, Tennessee, to associate with W. C. Handy, who specialized in jazz and blues. Those influences are heard in *From the Black Belt*.

#### The Northeast

Our final destination is the Northeast region, containing states from Maine to Washington, D.C. It has been the beneficiary of many natural resources that have directly influenced its early industrialization and urbanization. New York City's and Baltimore's natural harbors have made them leading shipping and banking centers. A megalopolis, meaning a string of connected urban areas, stretches from Boston to Washington, D.C. today. It is the most densely populated of all the regions.

The Appalachian Mountains provided coal for the early steel industry and water power for the early mills along the fall line of the Piedmont Plateau. They form a divide between the rivers flowing into the Atlantic and those emptying into the Gulf of Mexico.



Stretching some 1,500 miles from Canada to Alabama, the Appalachian Mountains provide a study in contrasts. They are rich in natural resources, but also contain some of the poorest people in the world, who live in a region loosely defined as Appalachia (generally understood to include some areas of Kentucky, Tennessee, western Virginia, and West Virginia).

Aaron Copland (1900–1990), one of this centuries most outstanding composers, wrote Appalachian Spring as a ballet for Martha Graham, a famous choreographer. The setting for the ballet is a farming community in the northeast. In this composition, Copland quoted "Simple Gifts," a hymn from the Shaker sect. It provides a glimpse of life in a small religious community. A splinter group of the Quakers, the Shakers were at first called "shaking Quakers" because of their body-shaking ecstasy that occurred during worship. The Shakers strive to be morally perfect. Their communities embrace the concept of equality and obedience to one another.

Today, only two communities in Maine and Massachusetts survive. However, the Shakers made important contributions to American life. They invented the circular saw and washing machine and were the first to package commercial seed. Authentic examples of simple and functionally styled Shaker furniture are collectors items today.

Copland's work is well suited to the basic architectural and life-style themes of the Shakers—symmetry, order, simplicity, and function. Although Copland was not directly

associated with the Shakers, "Simple Gifts" was an appropriate hymn to include in one of his works because simplicity was such an important goal in his musical composition. He wanted his music to be appreciated by a wide audience and to communicate so clearly that people could understand it without having to hear it over and over again. "I felt that it was worth the effort," he once said, " to see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest terms." In another example of cultural geography influencing the composer, Copland's writing has the flavor of folk music and is closely related to Appalachian fiddle tunes.

Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America now awaits you. When you experience the music, listen to the studio guests, and see the images and maps, you will deepen your understanding of the ways that geography influences composers. Those composers, in turn, influence the listeners' appreciation of geography. Their music makes a lasting contribution to the cultural geography of their regions and to the rich cultural heritage of all Americans.



# **Geography Activities**

# **Musical Geography**

Now that you have learned about classical music and some geography of the United States, you are ready to create your own imaginary musical "masterpiece." Your teacher will replay the musical selections from the program to give you your inspiration. All that you need are an atlas, an awareness of your own surroundings, and a musical imagination. Have fun!

The program divides the United States
into five regions. Since a region can be
defined by various common geographic
features or cultural characteristics, how
would you choose to define the region in
which you live?
,
What states border your state?
What large city or cities are nearest to you
What large city or cities are nearest to you

2. The geographic coordinates (latitude and longitude) of Mount St. Helens are 46N122W. What are the coordinates of your town or city?

The regions in the field trip have speci physical features. What physical feature are in your region?
Classical music is often inspired by physical geography. In your region, wh geographical feature(s) would you choo for inspiration?
Cultural features are those that describe
people and what they do in and with the environment. Describe the people, and what they do, in your region.

cultural characteristics(s) would you

include in your music?



Over time people change their

environment. How have people in your region changed over the past 100 years?
What changes would you predict in the next 100 years?
Composers use strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion to describe a place. What instruments would you include in your music?
How would you use these the instrument to describe your region?
What is the name of your imaginary musical "masterpiece?"

# **Additional Activities**

- 1. **Region.** A region can be based on anything you want it to be; it is an "area of sameness." Challenge students to create their own regions, based on criteria chosen by them, e.g., foods, physical characteristics, economic activities, fashion, other selections of classical or popular music, etc. The Nine Nations of North America and Geography for Life, referenced in the bibliography, provide some examples.
- 2. Volcano Distribution Map. Research and discuss the three main types of volcanoes and the sites of the most active volcanoes in the world. Locate them on a map. Compare student maps with population distribution and density and plate tectonic maps, showing major fault lines. Where are the volcanoes in relation to cities? Is there a pattern in relation to fault lines?
- 3. Appalachian Mountains—Compare and Contrast. The Appalachian Mountains include numerous sub-units ranging from Canada to Georgia (The Blue Ridge Mountains, Adirondacks, etc.). Direct students to research the unique cultural characteristics, history, and results of change by man on the physical environment.



- 4. Literature and Geography. Literature, as well as music, provides a rich source of geographic knowledge and description. Direct the students to read a short story or folk tale. Ask students to rewrite or retell the story, retaining the author's original plot but changing the setting to another geographical region.
- 5. Music and Geography. Working in groups, students will listen to musical excerpts from the Electronic Field Trip, or other classical works with a geographical theme. Ask each group to create a collage based on what they hear and the geographical theme.
- 6. Musical Imagery and Geography.

  Direct students to listen to other selections of classical music related to geography and write down what they hear, think, and feel while listening. Then tell them to research the composer and background information to check their reaction with the composers intent.
- 7. "Father of the Waters"—Music and Historical Geography. Direct students to listen to the recording of the *Mississippi Suite* by Grofé. Use the music as a device for "seeing" the Mississippi River through the eyes of LaSalle, DeSoto, Marquette, and Joliet. Research and map the journeys of these travelers. What physical and cultural features did they see? What physical and cultural features are present now?

- 8. The Mississippi River—Compare and Contrast. Compare and contrast life on the Upper Mississippi with life on the Lower Mississippi (below St. Louis) yesterday and today.
- 9. The Colorado River—Physical and Cultural Geography. Direct students to research the importance of the Colorado River. The research should include its role in creating the Grand Canyon and subsequent importance in supplying water to the population centers in the West.
- 10. The Many Functions of Rivers—
  Physical and Cultural Geography.

  Direct students to brainstorm and to discuss the importance and functions of rivers. These may include: as politic boundaries, as escape routes, as source

of rivers. These may include: as political boundaries, as escape routes, as sources of mechanical and hydroelectric power, as nuclear waste "cooling" areas as well as more common responses such as recreation, as sources of drinking water, as waste management, as transportation corners, etc. Students should compile a list of at least 15 items.



# **Musical Chairs**

#### **Addition And Subtraction**

A chamber orchestra usually consists of from 25 to 40 players. Prior to 1800, most orchestras were about that size. When composers of the classical period, such as Mozart and Haydn, wrote orchestral works, the musical group they had in mind was actually what we now call a chamber orchestra.

The symphony orchestra, about 100 pieces, came into its own in the 19th century. However, chamber orchestras exist today, in the 20th century, as well. If you wanted to buy a concert ticket this month in Los Angeles, for example, you could choose to hear either the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which is a large symphony orchestra, or the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

#### **Subtraction**

Another possibility is that you attend a concert by a symphony orchestra and settle back in your chair to enjoy a piece by a composer who wrote for that large group. When that first piece comes to an end, you suddenly notice a large number of players rise from their chairs and leave the stage. A glance at your concert program reveals that a Mozart symphony is next. The number of players that remain on stage represents a chamber orchestra, and so the sound you hear next—in the Mozart symphony—will be close to the sound Mozart had in mind when he composed it.

#### **Addition**

For Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America, the opposite has taken place. Instead of observing a large group that subtracts players, you will see and hear a smaller group, the Virginia Chamber Orchestra, which has added players. The players have been added in pieces that require instruments not usually found in a chamber orchestra. Since television moves fast, the "added" players will already be on stage at the beginning of the program, and they will remain in their chairs throughout all the pieces. When you see the Virginia Chamber Orchestra on television, watch the screen very carefully. The cameras move around to show you as many instruments as possible, especially when they are playing very important parts.



# **Orchestration**

To orchestrate a piece, a composer must decide: what instruments to use, how many of each instrument to use (particularly in the woodwinds and brass sections, where each instrument often has a different part to play), and where in the piece these instruments should play.

All the instruments used in the piece do not necessarily play all the time. Sometimes a particular instrument plays, and sometimes it "rests." When you watch the television program, can you see a player who is "resting"?

#### **Orchestration Chart**

The chart below shows that the instruments found in an orchestra in Vienna, Austria in 1790. The basic instruments the Virginia Chamber Orchestra most often uses today are the same.

Vienna Orchestra of 1790	Virginia Chamber Orchestra
18 strings (violins, violas, strings cellos, basses)	18 strings
2 flutes	2 flutes
2 oboes	2 oboes
2 clarinets	2 clarinets
2 bassoons	2 bassoons
4 horns	4 horns
2 trumpets	2 trumpets
timpani (sometimes)	timpani (sometimes)
harpsichord	

Every musical example in *Wonders of Geography:* A Musical Atlas of America requires all the above instruments plus two trombones. However, each example also uses slightly different instruments, especially in the percussion section, for special musical effects the composer had in mind.

Painted Desert: vibraphone, bells, bass drum, piano, harp

On the Trail: coco shells (temple blocks), cymbal, bass drum, celeste, piano, harp

Volcano: thunder sheet, cymbals, tam tam, bass drum

Father of the Waters: bells, tom tom, Indian tom tom, harp

From the Black Belt: cymbal, slapstick, bass drum

Appalachian Spring: xylophone, triangle, tabor, woodblock, glockenspiel, harp, piano

Painted Desert, On the Trail, and Father of the Waters show another important difference from the chart of basic instruments. Four of the players "double," meaning that each of those four individuals plays two different instruments in the same program. It works like this. The person who plays:

second flute also plays piccolo second oboe also plays English horn second clarinet also plays bass clarinet second bassoon also plays contra bassoon



# **Music Activities**

- 1. Give each student a copy of the orchestration chart on page 12. Ask students to look for and listen for the instruments as they view the program.
- 2. Discuss with the students the instruments used for special musical effects. Ask students to find pictures of the more unusual instruments to bring to class. If your school band or orchestra owns any of the smaller instruments, borrow them and show them to the class, or arrange for the class to visit the band or orchestra rehearsal room for a closer look.
- 3. Just as an author can quote another writer's work, a composer can quote music written by someone else. Sing or play this example from the Shaker Hymn "Simple Gifts," which Aaron Copland quotes in *Appalachian Spring*.

Expressing simplicity and complexity in music.

- a. Circle the notes that form the first half of the D major scale. Why is this scale pattern, in quarters and eighth notes, appropriate to illustrate the idea of simplicity?
- b. Write the beginning of an original melody that would be appropriate to describe the opposite idea, complexity.







- 4. This program includes music that illustrates a desert, a canyon, a river, and a volcano. Imagine that you are writing a musical piece about a glacier, a tornado, or a waterfall. Answer the following questions, concerning your composition.
  - Is the music fast or slow? Why?
    Is the music powerful or delicate? Why?
    What instruments are featured? Why?
- 5. Aaron Copland, Ferde Grofé and William Grant Still drew from the musical traditions of Shaker hymns, Appalachian fiddle tunes, American Indian dances, and blues and jazz. Compile a list of other types of music typical of different cultures found in the United States and the areas in which you would be most apt to hear them. Bring the music or a recording to class.
- 6. You are selecting music for a program entitled "Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of Europe." What compositions would you include?
- 7. William Grant Still traveled to Memphis, Tennessee to play in a band, arrange music, and learn about African American jazz and blues. Another American city with a strong jazz tradition is New Orleans. Research jazz, past and present, in New Orleans. Share your research with the class.
- 8. Another type of cultural music unique to the United States is the spiritual. Research the use and meaning of spirituals during the time of slavery and in the present.
- 9. Dvorak quoted a spiritual in "Symphony From the New World." Compare Dvorak's use of the spiritual in the "Largo" movement from that symphony with Copland's use of the Shaker hymn in *Appalachian Spring*.

- 10. Program music is music that is inspired by, or that suggests, a program. A program, in this sense, means one or more ideas outside the music itself. All the music for Wonders of Geography: A Musical Atlas of America was composed in this century. Discuss examples of earlier program music, such as Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (No. 6), which includes musical imitations of the nightingale, the cuckoo, and the quail.
- 11. When writing program music for a soloist, a composer does not have the many tone colors, provided by a variety of instruments, that could be used in a piece written for orchestra. The mental images must be created by imaginative use of the tone color possibilities of the single instrument playing the solo—for example, the piano.
  - a. Invite a pianist to bring in music or perform solo pieces that suggest geographic or cultural features.
  - b. Research those features.
  - c. Describe how the composer suggests mental images of the geographic features in the solo pieces.
- 12. Play a recording of "The Moldau" by Smetana. Research that river and its region. Compare Smetana's musical description of a river with Grofé's "Father of the Waters."
- 13. Invite a professional musician or music teacher to visit your class.
- 14. Attend a live concert.



# **Suggested Student Resources**

#### **Books**

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<sup>\*</sup>Indicates resources used to write the essay.