



**Grand Canyon Suite** (Grofé)  
**Fall River Legend** (Gould)  
**El Salón México** (Copland)  
**Plow that broke the Plains**  
(Thomson)

# **American Masterpieces**

*Conductors:*

**Maurice Abravanel**

**Morton Gould**

**Leopold Stokowski**

**Antal Doráti**

**alto**

# AMERICAN MASTERPIECES

## **Ferde Grofé: *Grand Canyon Suite***

1	I. Sunrise	5:27
2	II. Painted Desert	5:38
3	III. On the Trail	7:42
4	IV. Sunset	5:01
5	V. Cloudburst	8:17

## **Utah Symphony**

**Maurice Abravanel, conductor**

## **Virgil Thomson: *The Plow that Broke the Plains***

6	I. Prelude	1:27
7	II. Pastorale. Grass	1:11
8	III. Cattle	2:55
9	IV. Blues. Speculation	2:35
10	V. Drought	0:58
11	VI. Devastation	4:58

## **Symphony of the Air**

**Leopold Stokowski, conductor**

## **Morton Gould: *Fall River Legend***

12	I. Prologue and Waltzes	3:18
13	II. Elegy	3:19
14	III. Church Social	3:26
15	IV. Hymnal Variations	4:29
16	V. Cotillion	3:28
17	VI. Epilogue	2:22

## **Gould: *Latin-American Symphonette***

18	Guaracha	3:19
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## **Morton Gould and his Orchestra**

19	<b>Aaron Copland: <i>El Salón México</i></b>	9:43
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## **Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra**

**Antal Doráti, conductor**

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Project Co-ordinator: **Robin Vaughan** (musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk)

American classical music came of age in the 1930s. Through the late 19th century, and into the 20th, several generations of American composers established a classical tradition in America, but most had been trained in Europe and wrote in a European style. But in the years between the wars, a younger generation began exploring distinctively New World styles, initially Jazz, and later folk music, cowboy songs and dance styles from Central and South America. The result was 'Americana', an approach to orchestral music that incorporated popular styles and consciously referenced American themes. These works give an overview of the Americana of the 1930s and 40s, richly orchestrated scores presenting a diverse and vibrant musical vernacular.

**Ferde Grofé** (1892–1972) was a composer, pianist and arranger, a versatile figure on the New York music scene. He worked as an arranger for the Paul Whiteman Band, for whom he created the original band arrangement of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, as well as two later orchestral arrangements. That experience inspired Grofé to begin writing his own orchestral works. *Grand Canyon Suite* was composed between 1929 and 1931. It was originally titled *Five Pictures of the Grand Canyon*. The composition followed a similar course to Grofé's arrangements of *Rhapsody in Blue*. It was first performed, in a version for 20-piece ensemble, by Paul Whiteman in 1931, and Grofé then expanded the score for full symphony orchestra.

Grofé based the work on his memories of a trip to the Grand Canyon in 1916. The five movements follow the course of a day: Sunrise, Painted Desert, On the Trail, Sunset, Cloudburst. The work is highly melodic and

atmospheric, but Grofé also uses the orchestra to add specific sounds from nature: the woodwinds imitate birds and the trumpets chirp like crickets. Coconut shells are employed for the sound of a donkey traipsing through the hills. There is also a storm in the final movement, graphically represented by the percussion section with wind machine and thunder sheet. But the work ends on a brighter note, with two sections that Grofé called 'Moon Comes from Behind the Clouds' and 'Nature Rejoices in all its Grandeur'.

Conductor **Maurice Abravanel** (1903–93) was an American conductor, born in Greece of Sephardic Jewish descent. His early career was spent in Germany, France and Australia. From 1936 he worked as a conductor at the New York Metropolitan Opera, and in 1947 was appointed Music Director of the Utah Symphony. He conducted the Utah orchestra for 30 years, raising the ensemble to international status and making over 100 recordings.

**Virgil Thomson** (1896–1989) is best remembered today as a music critic, but he was also active as a composer, particularly early in his career. In the mid-20s, he studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, where he came under the influence of Erik Satie, whose efficient but light-hearted musical style informed many of Thomson's later scores. *The Plow That Broke the Plains* was written as the music for a 1936 documentary film of the same name. The film, written and directed by Pare Lorentz, was a government-sponsored public information project, informing audiences about how farming practices on the Great Plains

had led to the dust bowl, and proselytizing for Roosevelt's New Deal reforms. Lorentz encouraged Thomson to include folk songs in the score, and he also added cowboy songs, bluegrass and hymns. The melodies are largely unaltered, but Thomson employs evocative instruments for a more authentic feel: saxophones, banjo, harmonium. Nevertheless, the textures are spare and efficient, and the expression direct, showing the influence of Satie. The orchestral suite that Thomson created from the score is made up of six movements: Prelude, Pastorale (Grass), Cattle, Blues (Speculation), Drought, Devastation.

**Leopold Stokowski** (1882–1977) was a British-born conductor and one of the most prominent figures in American classical music in the 20th century. He is best remembered as Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, a position he held from 1912 to 1938. In 1945, Stokowski founded the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra, with whom he made the first recording *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. From 1955, he led the Symphony of the Air, an orchestra made up of players from the recently disbanded NBC Symphony Orchestra, with whom he made this 1961 stereo recording.

***Fall River Legend*** was a ballet created by choreographer Agnes de Mille in 1948. It tells the story of Lizzie Borden, who was tried for the murder of her father and stepmother in 1892. De Mille worked closely with composer **Morton Gould** (1913–96), and they jointly agreed to reverse the verdict of the trial: Borden had been acquitted, but in the ballet she is found guilty. The ballet opens with the delivery of the

guilty verdict, and then plays out scenes from Borden's life in flashback. Gould structured the score as a series of dances, including waltzes and a parish dance at a church social, linked together by more narrative passages to advance the story. The later orchestral suite is made up of the dances without the linking sections.

***Guaracha*** is the third movement of Gould's *Symphonette No.4*, 'Latin American Symphonette'. Gould used the title Symphonette as a way of updating the classical form of the sinfonietta. He associated the term with the then-fashionable concepts of kitchenette and dinette. His first three works in this form draw on jazz and swing music, while No.4 is dedicated to Latin American dances. The *guaracha* is an up-tempo dance, originating in Cuba, its sprightly style and rhythmic impetus making it ideal for the scherzo of Gould's symphony in miniature.

**Aaron Copland** (1900–90) played a key role in establishing an American musical vernacular. In the late 1930s and early 40s, here wrote a series of ballets (including *Rodeo*, another Agnes de Mille project), which brought popular idioms and distinctively American sounds to the ballet stage. ***El Salón México*** predated these, it was written 1932–36, but the work is similar in spirit, an orchestral composition based on popular Mexican dances of the day. The piece was inspired by a visit to the 'El Salón México' dance hall in Mexico City. The venue was made up of three halls, Copland recalled, 'one for people dressed in your way, one for people dressed in overalls but shod, and one for the barefoot'. Copland quotes at least four Mexican folk songs,

which he purchased in sheet music on the visit, *El palo verde*, *La Jesusita*, *El mosco*, and *El malacate*. The work is structured as a tour of the three dance halls, from the formal, ballroom style of the upper-class hall, to the more rustic style of the second, and finally a stamping dance in the third.

**Antal Doráti** (1906–88) was a Hungarian-born conductor and composer. He held appointments with many of the leading orchestras in America and the UK from the 1940s to the 1970s. Doráti had studied composition under Bartók in Budapest and had a lifelong passion for contemporary music. He made many recordings of Copland's works, including this account of *El Salón México*, made during his tenure as Music Director of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (now Minnesota Orchestra) from 1949 to 1960.

— GAVIN DIXON, 2021



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**Musical Concepts  
c/o ALTO Distribution  
Magnus House  
8 Ashfield Rd  
Cheadle SK81BB, UK**

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