

# ON THE TRAIL

(from Grand Canyon Suite)

Ferde Grofé

Arranged by Andrew H. Dabczynski

## INSTRUMENTATION

Conductor Score	1
Violin I	8
Violin II	8
Viola	5
Cello	5
String Bass	5
Temple Block	1

One of the most widely recognized American orchestra pieces! Known to listeners from its use in the hit movie, *A Christmas Story*, in Disneyland rides, and more recently in Ken Burns' documentary, *The National Parks*, this accessible arrangement maintains the integrity, style, and overall effect of the larger work. True-to-the-original bowings and fingerings are provided in a player-friendly key with simplified accidentals and rhythms, and, of course, the indispensable burro "clip-clop" as played by temple blocks.



## PROGRAM NOTES

In 1916, a young musician from New York City named Ferdinand “Ferde” Grofé traveled to the west, and at that time first experienced the magnificence of the Grand Canyon—one of the natural wonders of the world that was still three years away from being designated officially as a US National Park. Over a decade later, after becoming the pianist and chief arranger for the famous Paul Whitman Orchestra, Grofé drew inspiration from that early trip in composing “Five Pictures of the Grand Canyon.” Soon after its Chicago premiere in 1931, the work became known as “The Grand Canyon Suite.” Each movement of the piece recalls a different desert scene and experience—“Sunrise,” “Painted Desert,” “On the Trail,” “Sunset,” and “Cloudburst.” This arrangement of “On the Trail” is a string orchestra version of the third movement, which has become the most familiar section of the suite. Its strains have been used to accompany many films, including the hit movie, *A Christmas Story*, Ken Burns’ epic documentary, *The National Parks*, and even to accompany rides in Disneyland. “On the Trail” is best described in the composer’s own words: “A traveler and his burro are descending the trail. The sharp hoof beats of the animal form an unusual rhythmic background to the cowboy’s song. The sounds of a waterfall tell them of a nearby oasis. A lone cabin is soon sighted... Fully rested, the travelers journey forth at a livelier pace. The movement ends as man and burro disappear in the distance...” The sure-and-steady hoof beats are performed here by percussive temple blocks; the “cowboy song” is heard first in the cello section, then is played by the other instruments. The burro’s distinctive and humorous “hee-haw” is heard in the movement’s opening and closing measures. The animal gets the first and last word.

## NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

This arrangement is somewhat different from the original, particularly considering that it is for strings only, with temple blocks. Thus, Grofé’s woodwind parts and effects are translated to strings. This version also is shorter than the original, and is in obvious ABA form with an introduction and coda. “On the Trail” should be performed at a comfortable *allegretto tempo*—not hurried—remembering always that Grofé intended the piece to directly suggest the steady sound, motion, and attitude of the burros and mules that faithfully carry Grand Canyon visitors up and down the steep canyon walls. For this reason, the inclusion of temple blocks should not be considered optional; their sound is virtually the signature of this piece. The opening measures of the piece emulate a burro’s “hee-haw,” and may be enhanced by sliding between notes (note that glissandi are not written in the parts). The main section (beginning m. 3) contains rhythmic “two-against-three” eighth-note tension between the first violin 6/8 theme and the rest of the ensemble (mm. 3–26), and particularly the cello counter-melody (beginning at the pickup to m. 5). Care should be taken that the steady eighths in the second violins, violas, celli, basses, and temple blocks do not morph into the ambling 6/8 feel of the first violin theme. The brief (though not extreme) *accelerando* at m. 27 ceases in a *ritard* just six measures later. At mm. 37–56, the tempo returns to the original metronome marking. This second section (mm. 34–56) is marked by a broad, harmonically-rich augmentation of the cello counter-melody theme in the upper strings. This section should convey a sense of tranquility when compared to the opening. The tempo slows dramatically (m. 56), with a *ritard* leading to a D.C. (m. 63). The spirit of the opening section returns until an *accelerando* serves to transition to the coda (m. 64). This coda section should be quite lively until m. 71, where a sudden *ritard* returns to the opening hee-haw figure, this time punctuated with an even longer-held fermata. The final measure—*vivo*—should be a quick, sudden surprise to bring the piece to a humorous end.

# On the Trail

(from Grand Canyon Suite)

CONDUCTOR SCORE  
Duration - 3:30

Allegretto (not fast) (♩ = 70)

FERDE GROFÉ  
Arranged by Andrew H. Dabczynski

Violins I  
Violins II  
Viola  
Cello  
String Bass  
Temple Block

Vlins. I  
Vlins. II  
Vla.  
Cello  
Str. Bass  
Temp. Block

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11

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vla.

Cello

Str. Bass

Temp. Block

Musical score for measures 10-13. The score includes parts for Violins I and II, Viola, Cello, String Bass, and Timpani/Block. Measure 11 is marked with a box containing the number 11. The Cello part has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 10 and a half note with a fermata in measure 11. The Viola part has a half note with a fermata in measure 11. The String Bass part has a half note with a fermata in measure 11. The Timpani/Block part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, with measure numbers 10, 11, 12, and 13 indicated below.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vla.

Cello

Str. Bass

Temp. Block

Musical score for measures 14-18. The score includes parts for Violins I and II, Viola, Cello, String Bass, and Timpani/Block. The Cello part has a half note with a fermata in measure 14 and a triplet of eighth notes in measure 18. The Viola part has a half note with a fermata in measure 14. The String Bass part has a half note with a fermata in measure 14. The Timpani/Block part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, with measure numbers 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 indicated below.

19

Vlns. I *mf*

Vlns. II

Vla. *arco*

Cello *mf*

Str. Bass

Temp. Block

19 20 21 22 23

Vlns. I *cresc.*

Vlns. II *cresc.*

Vla. (V) *cresc.*

Cello (V) *cresc.*

Str. Bass *cresc.*

Temp. Block

24 25 26 27 28

*poco accel.* (V) *To Coda* ⊕

## 29 Allegro (♩ = 100)

ff mf rit.

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vla.

Cello

Str. Bass

Temp. Block

ff mf

29 30 31 32 33

## Slower (♩ = 60)

f mf

Vlns. I

Vlns. II

Vla.

Cello

Str. Bass

Temp. Block

f mf mp

34 35 36 37 38

39

Vlns. I (V) V (V) V

Vlns. II (V) V (V) V

Vla. (V) V (V) V

(second time *f*)

Cello *mp-mf*

Str. Bass *mp-mf*

Temp. Block

39 40 41 42 43 44

47

Vlns. I (V) V (V) V

Vlns. II (V) V (V) V

Vla. V

Cello V

Str. Bass V

Temp. Block

45 46 47 48 49 50 51

**Lento (in 2) (♩ = 55)**

1. (V) 3  
2. rit. V 56 4

Vlns. I, II  
Vla.  
Cello  
Str. Bass  
Temp. Block

52 53 54 55 56 57

4 rit. D.C. al Coda

Vlns. I, II  
Vla.  
Cello  
Str. Bass  
Temp. Block

58 59 60 61 62 63



64  $\text{\textcircled{C}}$  Coda  
Allegro (♩ = 100)

Vlns. I *ff*

Vlns. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Cello *ff*

Str. Bass *ff*

Temp. Block

64 65 66 67 68 69

Vlns. I *mf* *rit.* *div.* *f* *vivo* *fff*

Vlns. II *mf* *f* *fff*

Vla. *mf* *f* *fff*

Cello *mf* *f* *fff*

Str. Bass *mf* *f* *fff*

Temp. Block

70 71 72 73 74

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