

Continental Divide

(an American cantata)

Peter Bird
2010

Piano Parts



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Program Notes on *Continental Divide*

1. Timberline..... [tacet] 5

This first number is celebratory and could be subtitled, “Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country.” But, rather than sonata form, it has a loose Mahlerian structure where one main melody is developed while 3 others vie for expression. A certain Romantic instability of key symbolizes enthusiasm that escapes Classical restraint. A final repetition of the initial section makes this structurally a da-capo aria for chorus.

The other 7 numbers of the cantata progress in historical order, from Pleistocene times before humans arrived, through the Arapaho era, the fur trade, pioneer days, arrival of the first tourists, the gold/silver rush, and the modern age of national parks and interstate highways. The central numbers (#3~6) have texts from oral tradition or contemporary accounts; the framing numbers at the start and end incorporate my own attempts at poetry.

2. Yellowstone [tacet] 7

The strong mantle plume that created Yellowstone has a few peers in the world: Iceland, Afar, and Hawaii. But here alone the volcanic plateau was built on the back of the older Rocky Mountain chain, producing lodgepole forests and parklands at 8,000’ elevations and peaks that go much higher. This number depicts a summer dawn along one of the verdant high-altitude river valleys (*e.g.*, Lamar River, or Yellowstone River above the falls) where bison and elk are grazing, until interrupted by wolves. The text is a set of 6 haiku-like nature poems, with 5/7/5-syllable structure but no rhyme.

3. Vision quest [tacet] 9

The adults of the village sing one of the traditional Arapaho Eagle Songs, with its proud refrain, “My father gave me the song of the eagle.” (I did not alter this in any way, except to add some very light instrumental accompaniment.) A young man [or a group of young men; it may be performed either way] drifts off to follow the calls of a distant eagle. He is inspired to climb the mountain Neniisotoyou’u in search of other animal mentors. He is rebuffed by a bear, and then by a cougar, but high on the mountain shoulder he feels the presence and inspiration of Thunderbird. I based his (new) song on the text of a vision-quest song of Chief Yellow Calf: “[Thunder]bird walks about; the sky is turning yellow.” (That is: Soon he will fly; prepare for thunder.) Performed in the Arapaho language.

4. Osborne Russell [tacet] 11

Osborne Russell (1814-1892) was a largely self-taught man from Maine who entered the trapper’s life and the Rocky Mountain fur trade at the age of 20. (Later he was a miner, a farmer, a trader, and was elected judge and then triumvir in the provisional government of Oregon Territory.) He recorded his experiences in *Journal of a Trapper...* which was published posthumously. This solo aria takes its text from the book’s valedictory poem, *The Hunter’s Farewell*, which may be the only extant poem by anyone involved in this chapter of our history. His description of the impact of firearms on the flocks of the mountains and the herds of the plains is sensitive and moving.

5. South Pass..... [tacet] 13

The Sweetwater River route through South Pass is more lonely and barren than scenic, but topography dictated that here the California Trail, the Oregon Trail, and the Mormon Trail necessarily ran together for several days travel as they approached the Divide. I have merged 3 songs of the trail (each in its own meter and its own key) to represent the passage of these 3 distinct kinds of pioneers in the same year. *Ho! for California* represents the gold-miners; both text and tune are authentic, although reharmonized here. The Oregon-Trail text and tune are my own inventions. The text of the LDS hymn *Come, Come Ye Saints* was written by William Clayton (1814-1879) while traveling the trail in 1846; here, I have given it a new tune that better harmonizes with the others. Despite the cultural and musical contrasts, there is no actual dissonance; perhaps I may even suggest that a new kind of polymodal harmony emerges?

6. Isabella Bird15

Isabella Bird (1831-1904) was a very independent Englishwoman who toured the Sierra Nevada and the Colorado Rockies in 1873: arriving by train, renting a horse, and finding her own way through mountains and plains, come blizzard or sun. Her account, *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, is well worth reading. This solo number uses a montage of her words to describe her ascent of Longs Peak (which was guided by the colorful and mysterious "Mountain Jim" Nugent). She may have been the first woman of European ancestry to make the ascent; it is certain that later she was the first woman inducted into the Royal Geographical Society, in London in 1892.

7. Silverton20

Saturday night in a mining town! This turbulent setting with its many conflicting personalities, subplots, and emotions is represented by the overlaying of up to 6 tunes at once. Traditional tunes *An Outlandish Knight* and *Shenandoah* represent the women's point of view, and some new tunes (in the "gaslight" style of the times) represent the men's. An opera-buffa version of the sextet from *Lucia* transported into *La fanciula del West*.

8. Logan Pass [tacet] 23

Approaching Glacier Park from the East, today's tourists can drive directly from the lonely and pristine rolling prairie of the Blackfoot lands to some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in the world. Chief Mountain, St. Mary Lake, Logan Pass, and the Garden Wall will not be forgotten by anyone who has made this trip, and of course the automobile makes it possible for most. But, travel by car is much too fast for the spirit.

Performance Notes

Continental Divide is scored for 9 instruments: flute, oboe, horn in F, pedal timpani (II, III, IV), violin I, violin II, cello, double-bass, and piano. (Piano parts occur only in numbers 6 & 7.) If the chorus is large, it may be best to amplify the instruments. I would not want to double them, as this would destroy the "rugged individualism" and lonesome timbre of solo performances. The total duration of this cantata is about 51 minutes.

Peter Bird, Los Angeles, 2010

Piano

Continental Divide: 1. Timberline

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- Intentionally blank ---

Piano

Continental Divide: 2. Yellowstone

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- Intentionally blank ---

Piano

Continental Divide: 3. Vision quest

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- Intentionally blank ---

Piano

Continental Divide: 4. Osborne Russell

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- Intentionally blank ---

Piano

Continental Divide: 5. South Pass

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- Intentionally blank ---

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

Isabella Lucy Bird (1831-1904)

PETER BIRD

Moderato (♩=116)

Musical notation for measures 1-5. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The right hand (treble clef) plays chords, and the left hand (bass clef) plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The first measure is marked *mf* (solo). Pedal markings (Ped.) are present under the first four measures.

Musical notation for measures 6-10. Measure 6 is marked with a dynamic *mp* and an *accel.* marking. The left hand continues with eighth notes, and the right hand plays chords. Pedal markings (Ped.) are present under measures 6-10.

Musical notation for measures 11-15. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays eighth notes. Pedal markings (Ped.) are present under measures 11-15.

16 Allegro moderato (♩=132)

Musical notation for measures 16-17. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays eighth notes. The tempo is marked *Allegro moderato* (♩=132). Pedal markings (Ped.) are present under measures 16-17.

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

Piano

16

20

A

Musical notation for measures 20-24. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The right hand plays chords, and the left hand plays a rhythmic eighth-note pattern. Pedal markings are present under the left hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.

25

Musical notation for measures 25-29. The right hand continues with chords, and the left hand has a more active eighth-note line. Pedal markings are present. Dynamics include *f*.

30

Musical notation for measures 30-35. The right hand features chords and some melodic fragments. The left hand has eighth-note patterns. Pedal markings are present. Dynamics include *mf*.

36

Musical notation for measures 36-42. The right hand has chords and rests. The left hand has eighth-note patterns. Pedal markings are present.

43

B

As $\text{♩} + \text{♩}$

Musical notation for measures 43-47. The right hand has a melodic line with dotted rhythms. The left hand has chords. The time signature changes to 5/4. Pedal markings are present. Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*.

48

Musical notation for measures 48-52. The right hand has a melodic line. The left hand has chords. Dynamics include *mf*.

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird
Piano

54

Musical notation for measures 54-59. The system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef contains a melody of quarter notes and eighth notes. The bass clef contains a accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

60

Musical notation for measures 60-65. The system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef contains a melody with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) starting in measure 63. The bass clef contains a accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The key signature changes to two flats (B-flat and E-flat) in measure 63.

66

Musical notation for measures 66-71. The system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef contains a melody with dynamic markings of *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *f* (forte). The bass clef contains a accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The key signature changes to two sharps (F# and C#) in measure 71, and the time signature changes to 4/4.

72

Moderato (♩=100)

C

Musical notation for measures 72-80. The system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef contains a melody with dynamic markings of *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The bass clef contains a accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. There are fingerings of 3 and 2 indicated above and below the notes in measures 72-75. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in measure 80.

81

Musical notation for measures 81-90. The system consists of a treble and bass clef. The treble clef contains a melody with a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano). The bass clef contains a accompaniment of chords and eighth notes. The key signature changes to one flat (B-flat) in measure 84. There are fingerings of 7 indicated above and below the notes in measures 81-84.

91

Musical notation for measure 91. The system consists of a treble clef. The measure contains a single note with a dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano) and a fingering of 2.

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

Piano

18

93 S. *wolves,* *mf*

Ped. Ped.

97

Ped. Ped.

104 poco a poco rall. (-25%)

D

114 accel. (+45%) Andante moderato (♩=110)

E

154 rall. cadenza (freely) a tempo (♩=110)

E

170

E

183 Vln. I *8va*

E

187 Andante (♩=92)

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

Continental Divide: 6. Isabella Bird

Piano

191

Ped. Ped.

195

Ped. Ped. Ped.

200

F

Ped. Ped. Ped.

204

mf *mp*

208

p

212

pp *ppp*

4 5

4 5

Continental Divide: 7. Silverton

Peter Bird & traditional

PETER BIRD & traditional

Andante (♩=100)

strings gliss. *et*

mp

6

mf

10

15 **A**

mf

19

Continental Divide: 7. Silverton
Piano

22

25 **B** **C**

40

throws me out a-gain, I can sleep in a chair. It's

44 **D** **A.**

eas - y chairs where a hus band - waits for me.

54 **E**

Continental Divide: 7. Silverton
Piano

22

F
65 *poco a poco crescendo* **3** **3** *rall.* *poco a poco crescendo* **3**

G
74 *Adagio* (♩=78) **11** *accel.* **2**

H
88 *Poco adagio* (♩=84) **4** *rit.* *Adagio* (♩=72)

95 *Moderato* (♩=110)

Basses:

But it's Sat - ur - day, so Dev - il take the hind - most!

Piano

Continental Divide: 8. Logan Pass

PETER BIRD

TACET

--- *Intentionally blank* ---