

Scenes from The Wild West Programme Notes by Gary Ryan

The opening piece, **Railroad**, portrays the long journey of a steam train gaining momentum as it winds its way along a mountain track. The piece is played with the lowest two strings of the guitar tuned to C and G and results in the three open bass strings being tuned in perfect 5ths, like the cello. This allows greater technical freedom in the key of G major, facilitates more unusual six string chords and produces a rich bass sonority in the subdominant key centre of C major.

Across the Plain is quiet, lyrical and reflective, depicting a family on a wagon journey across the warm, wide-open plains and prairies of America. The musical feel is spacious and cinematic, reflecting the lyrical, sustained sounds of a string orchestra. I was in the process of writing this movement when I heard the news on 11th September 2001.

West Coast Breeze combines a fast finger picking style and right hand string stopping with African and Latin American cross rhythms to depict the sunny ‘beach lifestyle’, freedom and wealth of California. It is partly influenced by Pat Metheny, a guitarist and composer whose music I enjoy.

Rockweed is inspired by the intense desert heat of Monument Valley, Arizona and is a musical word play on the tumbleweeds that blow around the landscape. The style draws upon the music of Bobby McFerrin, James Brown, Miles Davis and Steve Reich and uses many of the techniques in electronic dance music (which Reich greatly influenced), particularly building energy over time via the use of trance-like repetitions and subtle rhythmic alterations.

Rondo Rodeo is a lively finale inspired by Aaron Copland, with many recurrent ideas suggesting the celebration and energy of the rodeo, complete with cowboys (and girls!), bucking bronco, farmyard noises, swinging saloon doors, honky tonk piano and the hoe-down!

Smoke Rising was written for Trinity College London as a study for Grade 7 as an addition to the original five pieces in the suite. Extensive use is made of ‘tamboura’ (a percussive sound resembling a drum) and there are also some tricky slur combinations to execute. The music depicts a ritual Apache Indian dance around a campfire and contains a short section where the strumming should be improvised around a sequence of chords in the style of a rock track.