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Teton Sketches  
Ed Wolfe

**Background:**

Warren Gref and I first met when he came to the University of New Mexico as the new horn instructor. I was working on my M.M. degree in composition while teaching instrumental music in the Albuquerque Public Schools. It was an interesting time in those days and Warren's hair was shoulder length, my beard had disappeared and my moustache made me look rather dapper! Ok, so I never looked dapper.

As soon as I heard him perform, I knew that I had to have him in my brass quintet, so I re-formed the Albuquerque Brass Quintet (not to be confused with the New Mexico Brass Ensemble formed by James Whitlow in the 50's and still in existence) and put together a library of music appropriate for educational presentations, weddings, church gigs and other concert settings. Playing in that group with Warren, Ray, Jeff and Evan was a highlight of my week each and every week.

Warren and I left Albuquerque at approximately the same time; Warren and Ann to perform in San Diego and I to teach in San Dimas. Those thirty years went by fairly quickly and along the way, Nancy (my wife) and I were privileged to have Warren and the San Diego Symphony Brass Quintet perform at our wedding ceremony in Simi Valley.

Upon my retirement last Spring, I began searching the web for "old" friends and found many of the folks I had known in my past including Johnny Cheetham, Ron Lipka, Sam Trimble and Warren Gref. When I e-mailed Warren, he asked, almost in passing, if I had any works for chamber orchestra. I did not, but quietly went to work on a project that I had wanted to write since our vacation to Yellowstone in 2002.

**The Project:** Teton Sketches for "smallish" chamber orchestra.

My "visual representations" in the writing of my compositions, (heavily influenced by the masters of programmatic music, Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner), tend not to tell a story, but to describe snapshots or sketches of things that I observe in nature or in my "mind's eye". My master's thesis "Caverna" is a musical tour through Carlsbad Caverns in Southern New Mexico. With each new "snapshot" of a formation, melodic material, harmonic textures and instrument timbers change. With the entire journey, one feels a movement from place to place with recollections of scenes that had been witnessed earlier in the tour as a unifying thread. So it was with Teton Sketches as well.

As Nancy and I drove across Utah, not much in the way of musical interest was occurring, but just North of Salt Lake City, there began to appear a line, just a purple trace of a rather impressive mountain range. The range was dark and far away. I had

never been to Wyoming before and had no idea what musical treasures would emerge during the next three days. As we approached Jackson Hole, however, details of the grandeur and magnificence were everywhere. The range had acquired detail, icebergs, crevices, water falls, trees, boulders and wildlife. Jackson Hole itself was a trip! Western influence, Indian culture, wildlife taxidermy and, oh yes, antlers! Antlers were everywhere... entryways to parks, arches above doorways, trophies on the walls and sold in the stores!

The ride to the top on the tramway was spectacular and the view of Jackson Hole and the surrounding valley from the peak was grand indeed. No wonder these youngest of all mountain ranges, the Cascades were called the Grand Tetons! What majesty, what power, but, I digress....

In this setting, the mind races and the creative juices flow. I was taking mental "snapshots" (as well as filmed ones) freely. The next day we arrived at "the lodge". The lobby was huge! The bar was huge! The rooms were huge, but nothing compared with the view. You see, the entire western wall of the lodge was a window, a panoramic view of miles and miles of majestic mountains! The lobby had comfortable chairs and lounges (all facing West) and the bar next to the lobby had a continuation of the window with the opportunity to sit at tables (facing West). Just outside was a massive patio with chairs, tables and lounges (most of which were facing West). And just to the West of the patio was... The Lake! And what a lake it was. It seemed to run into and bump the mountain itself. It was huge with birds... thousands of them... and people... thousands of them!

One cannot help remember their American History and the buffalo hunters, the trappers, Bill Cody, the Cowboys and Indians of our youth who now had become Western Folk and Native Americans. Tourists were busily snapping pictures of everything. But I, people stared strangely, was drawing staff lines on a piece of tablet borrowed from the bar tender (my manuscript tools were in my luggage) and there was not a moment to waste. I had to get some melodic material down. So, there I sat. At the bar with my diet Coke writing melodies and annotating visual impressions while people stared, shook their heads, and put in a new roll of 35 MM film!

### **The Music:**

The themes written and an outline of the form noted, we moved on to Yellowstone with my visual "snapshots" filed away in my "mind's eye" for viewing another day.

When Warren asked about my work for a "smallish" chamber orchestra, looked through my notes of unfinished works and the melodies of that previous visualization leapt off the pages of that now yellow tablet with the hand drawn staves. I set about putting it together. I now had the tools to work at a quicker pace than "in the old days". My software and new MAC took the place of my Osmiroid pen and onion skin paper. No more blueprints were required. I would just use my printer.

The introduction was easy: a dark image of a distant group of mountains outlined against a clear blue sky...”purple mountain’s majesty” and all that. The emergence of detail gave rise to the movement of the wildlife (seen and imagined) and the imitations of the fugue-ette began to emerge. Bill Cody was leading expeditions to fight the Native Americans. Fur trappers were hiking into the mountain passes to avoid the law. The Native Americans were dealing with the trappers and plotting against the Western Folk. Yep, each snapshot was clear.

Majestic formations kept getting in the way. Trumpet and horn fanfares crept into the serene string passages almost abruptly and seemingly out of place. The darkness of the night gave rise to dark keys (seven flats instead of five sharps with tempered tuning...that would do the trick!).

The dance of the folks at twilight and into the evening, but an uneven, not polished dance. No formality here. Just plain folks having a good time and, yes momentary recall of previous “snapshots”. That’s the ticket! That’s Teton Sketches.

-Ed Wolfe, 2008