

Robert G. Patterson
New World Landscapes (1989/1998)

Program Notes

New World Landscapes is a composition for two pianos in the form of impressionistic portraits of the New World. Each portrait is both generic and specific, and each defines a point in an historic progression—both from the New World’s geologic past to its uncertain future as well as from the composer/listener’s past (*i.e.*, childhood) to that person’s uncertain future (*i.e.*, death). The last note of the piece dovetails with the first to provide a continuous circular composition that illustrates the cyclic nature of time. Much of the philosophical thought behind the piece was suggested by readings from James Joyce’s monumental and daunting literary masterpiece, *Finnegans Wake*.

I. Nightlit Sierra

The magnificence of New World geology thrusts towards a starry sky in a time before humans ever tread its soil: the composer recollects his first views of the snow-covered Colorado Rocky Mountains during a childhood trip.

II. Land Rush

In the recent past, European settlers race across a continent: the race to repopulate the New World. The composer recalls a silent film clip that depicted the wild rush of humanity and horseflesh on the first day that Oklahoma was opened to homesteaders.

III. City Before Sunrise

The time is the present. A huge metropolis of living souls keeps vigil as our planet turns towards the dawning of a new day. There is outward calm and inner turbulence. Some do not survive the night, but a new day inevitably brings new hope.

IV. The Avenues of the Dead/Rebirth

Along the final courses of the ponderous Mississippi drainage system lie the eerie cemetery-cities of New Orleans, where the dead are buried above ground. Sinking gradually into boggy soil, the cold, neatly aligned stone mansions slowly spill their dead’s dust into the streaming waterways. Mingling with dust from millions of square miles, the dust of the dead spews into the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, where it will be born again in another guise. In the unknowable abyss of future time, the entire continent will wash away into the sea and undergo the same transformation.

New World Landscapes was commissioned by the Tennessee Music Teachers Association in 1989 for performance at its 1990 convention. Subsequently it received the Distinguished Composer of the Year award from the Music Teachers National Association.