

Program Notes, "Coast to Coast"
By Richard McGee

The Great Race March: It seems impossible that it has been 45 years since Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, Natalie Wood, and Peter Falk made this classic Blake Edwards comedy about an international car race, but *The Great Race* has endured as a masterpiece of slapstick entertainment that is as funny now as it was in 1965. Henry Mancini's musical score was, in true Mancini form, perfect. Engaging melodies abound, but none more memorable than this main title march. If you have not seen the film, I hope that hearing this wonderful march will inspire you to seek it out. For us, *The Great Race March* is the ideal way to kick off Nevada Pops' coast-to-coast adventure!

Luck Be a Lady: Frank Loesser's immortal hit from the Broadway smash *Guys and Dolls* was unofficially adopted by the residents of Las Vegas decades ago. The message, the sounds, and the timeless interpretations by singers such as Frank Sinatra evoked images of the Strip, the casinos, and the nightlife. The musicians of Nevada Pops know those images well, having made their livings up and down the Strip for years. So, it is appropriate to begin with the sounds of Nelson Riddle's famous arrangement, and let the musicians of Nevada Pops, for once, provide the melody as well as the accompaniment!

"On the Trail", from *Grand Canyon Suite:* Ferde Grofe (1892-1972) was an amazingly versatile musician in the early 20th century. He was an accomplished jazz pianist, but more importantly was also an imaginative and prolific arranger and composer. During his years with the famous Paul Whiteman Orchestra in the 1920s, Grofe arranged or composed hundreds of works, including George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Grofe orchestrated *Rhapsody in Blue* three different times, and created the warm yet interesting timbres that are hallmarks of the work.

Grand Canyon Suite (1931) is a five-movement composition for full symphony orchestra. By far the most familiar movement of the suite is the charming "On the Trail," which musically describes a day trip into the canyon on the backs of somewhat stubborn donkeys. It's wonderfully pastoral music, evoking images of the outdoors and the old West. Not only can one hear the donkeys' hooves and braying, but notice that, when it's time to come home, those donkeys develop considerably more "spring in their step!"

Laura Taylor's music: I met Laura almost twenty years ago, when I was playing in the house band at the Golden Nugget. Laura was opening for Don Rickles, and I was astonished at the depth of her musicianship. My admiration for her has only grown through the years, and we are pleased to welcome Laura back to perform with Nevada Pops once again. The music selected for her portion of the program reflects different aspects of American geography and the American spirit. Her set begins with the familiar *Route 66*, a great jazz standard that is all about cross-country, "coast to coast" travel. Next, Laura provides her unique rendition of Tony Bennett's

I Left My Heart in San Francisco, followed by a wonderfully bluesy *Goin' to Chicago*. After intermission, Laura returns with three more great melodies, including *All That Jazz* from the Broadway hit *Chicago*, followed by the intimate *Moonlight in Vermont*. Laura finishes with her own arrangement of *The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe*.

At a Dixieland Jazz Funeral: As we criss-cross the country, we must stop in New Orleans for a solemn event – at least, we THINK it's a solemn event. The French Quarter funerals in New Orleans are like none anywhere else in the world. This clever arrangement by Jared Spears begins in street band fashion, with the classic *Just a Closer Walk with Thee*. When the proper time is spent paying respects to the deceased, the band erupts into authentic Dixieland, with its most beloved tune, *When the Saints Go Marchin' In*. We should all be so lucky to get that kind of send-off!

Broadway Show-Stoppers Overture: Warren Barker's great scoring ability is evident with this collection of Broadway hits. After launching into a spirited version of *Everything's Coming Up Roses* from *Gypsy*, the music settles into a beautiful setting of *People* from *Funny Girl*. Music from *My Fair Lady* follows, with *A Little Bit of Luck*, followed by the title tune from *On A Clear Day*. The medley finishes in exciting fashion with *That's Entertainment*. These instantly recognizable tunes are a reminder of the golden age of songwriting, one of America's greatest exports of the 20th century.

Shenandoah: Frank Ticheli is a relative newcomer to the band scene, but is already a household name among band directors and musicians. His considerable arranging gifts are evident in this haunting setting of the old folk song, whose origins are still a mystery. Most assume that the song refers to Virginia, but some accounts suggest that the original song may have been dedicated to Shenandoah, Iowa. Whatever the origin, American folk music is an essential part of the tapestry of American life, and we must never forget this wonderful music.

Kansas City: The big band fans in the audience will love this one, as the Nevada Pops big band gets to "rock out" on this happy, rollicking blues tune. Several of the Nevada Pops musicians are featured on blues solos; listen and be reminded that many of the fabulous musicians who call Las Vegas home are virtuosos in both the classical and jazz genres. Nevada Pops is indeed fortunate to have such amazing musicians in its ranks – Enjoy!

America the Beautiful: No concert related to America would be complete without this timeless arrangement by Carmen Dragon. His version of *America the Beautiful* is simply the very best ever written: simple, direct, and perfect. We hope that you find this piece a fitting ending to our fun "Coast to Coast" excursion!