

Trains Bound for Glory

(1939–40) (UK premiere)

Fantasy for Chorus & Orchestra on Old American Themes adapted by David Drew from Weill's supplementary numbers for the World's Fair pageant *Railroads on Parade*.

- Sacramento (Sutter's Creek) (orchestra)* –
- 1 *Snagtooth Sal (tenor solo, chorus)* –
 - 2 *Tell Old Bill (baritone solo, men's chorus)*
 - 3 *Rounding the Horn*
The Sailor's Wife (chorus) –
Old Gray Mare and the Iron Horse (orchestra)
 - 4 *Two Little Girls in Blue*
Hurdy-gurdy Waltz (orchestra) –
Ballad, part 1 (tenor solo) –
Cakewalk (orchestra) –
Ballad, part 2 (tenor solo)
 - 5 *Souvenirs*
Clementine (tenor solo, mens' chorus) –
Snagtooth Sal (orchestra)
Slow March (orchestra)
 - 6 *This Train is Bound for Glory (chorus)*

Thomas Randle *tenor*

Trains Bound for Glory was the result of a commission from the American Symphony Orchestra, who gave the first performance, under Leon Botstein at Carnegie Hall, New York, on 20 September 1992.

One of the outstanding successes of the 1939 New York World's Fair, *Railroads on Parade* was revived at the 1940 Fair in somewhat revised

form with additional music. Some of the new numbers replaced omitted passages of narration and dialogue, while others were inspired by new 'exhibits'. All of them constitute an appendix to the original 1939 score, rather than an integral part of it.

Since most of the material for *Trains Bound for Glory* is derived from the supplementary numbers, it is in no sense a 'concert suite' from *Railroads on Parade*. Such a suite, indeed, would be barely practicable, given the integrated form of the original score (a concert version of which is currently under consideration).

Whereas *Railroads on Parade* was essentially a chronicle of American railroad history, *Trains Bound for Glory* has no narrative or programmatic significance. It is for purely musical reasons that the Fantasy begins with music associated in the pageant with the first Californian Gold Rush. After culminating in an affectionately ironic evocation of the 1890s – based on a hit song of the time whose resemblance to Charles K. Harris's 'After the Ball' might in a later age have been regarded as a copyright-infringement – the Fantasy ends, unhistorically, with music for a Lincoln scene.

If in *Railroads on Parade* there are moments when Weill joins Villa-Lobos and his old friend Arthur Honegger in evoking the sound and movement of trains, the only allusion of that sort in the Fantasy is at the point where the 'Old Gray Mare' is brought to a halt by the Iron Horse. Otherwise, the supplementary music leaves the railroads and finds its home elsewhere – whether

in the plantations, the ballroom, at sea, or at John Sutter's sawmill at Sacramento, where gold was struck, with sensational results, in 1848.

Considering that in *Railroads* Weill was addressing the broadest conceivable audience in an outdoor space where he had to reckon with every sort of acoustic and optical interference, the amount of characteristic detail in the score is astonishing. This is still – though only just – the USA of the New Deal, viewed by a European-born composer who had taken the first steps towards American citizenship in 1937. In their ironies, as in their wise simplicity, his folk-song arrangements seem closer to the world of Virgil Thomson than to that of Aaron Copland, and breathe the air of the Federal Theatre rather than Manhattan. But the arrangement of 'Old Bill' – catalogued by the folksong scholars Alan and J. A. Lomax as a 'negro bad-man song' of the sort favoured by black preachers as a warning to their congregation – includes an appropriate hint of Sportin' Life in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, the first American opera Weill heard after his arrival in New York in September 1935.

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