

Coast to Coast  
program Note

I've been writing music for quite a long time now, and until very recently, I would have said "Not a chance!" if anyone had said to me that I would someday write a piece that had parts for banjo, mandolin and steel drums, among other things. I've mostly composed orchestral and chamber music for the standard Western instruments—piano, cello, oboe, etc. But when the opportunity came—from the Cincinnati Art Museum's director, Timothy Rub—to write a piece which would celebrate Cincinnati art and Cincinnati artists, and would be played by members of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, I immediately thought that the European-derived sound world (that I and that the CSO spend so much of our time with) was just not going to be exactly right for this occasion. I did decide to include the violin (the instrument of which there are more than any other in an orchestra!), but I thought I'd use it in a somewhat non-classical way—somewhere between a fiddle and a percussion instrument. And the percussion instruments include mostly non-pitched instruments like bongos and various kinds of bells.

In fact, Coast to Coast is really more a percussion piece than anything else. Even the notes are there more for their rhythmic qualities than for their melodic or harmonic effects. The title is a metaphor for the many ways that crossing from one place or end to another play themselves out in this work. There are the various sections of slowly-moving patterns, which take the listener across from one place to another; there are the conversational exchanges among the three musicians—almost like a theater piece in which we find out, bit by bit, what's really going on. There is also the allusion to trains—a big part of Cincinnati's past and a big part of mine as well. There are many train sounds in this piece—trains going coast to coast and many other places as well. Finally, there are sounds which evoke for me the "coast to coast" relationship between my own childhood dreams and fantasies and those of my three-year-old son (he's thirteen now). So the music also alludes to the "coast" of one person's inner sounds as they somehow communicate across time with the "coast" of those of another.

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