



The Music of Harl McDonald



Producer's Note

Harl McDonald was born on a cattle ranch near Boulder, Colorado on July 27, 1899 and grew up in southern California. Musically talented from an early age, he studied piano and French horn, becoming proficient enough in the latter to join the Los Angeles Philharmonic while still in his teens. He received his Bachelor's degree in music from the University of California at Berkeley in 1921. An orchestral suite he composed won a national prize, allowing him to complete his compositional studies at the Leipzig Conservatory the following year.

Returning to the United States, he began a career as a piano soloist, accompanist, and lecturer on composition, also working as a church choirmaster and, occasionally, a boxer. He received an appointment to teach piano at the Philadelphia Musical Academy in 1924. Within three years, he joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, leading several of its choral groups and eventually becoming the head of its music department.

It was probably while preparing some of the university choruses that appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra that McDonald first met Leopold Stokowski, who encouraged his compositional activities by premiering his *Santa Fé Trail Symphony* in 1934, the first of several McDonald premières the conductor would undertake. That same year, McDonald was appointed to the board of directors of the orchestra, eventually becoming its manager in 1939, a post he would hold for the next sixteen years.

McDonald was a prolific composer; by 1944, it was estimated that he had written over 150 works. Several of them were influenced by his upbringing in the American southwest with its Spanish legacy, which can be heard in *The Santa Fé Trail* and *San Juan Capistrano*. Other compositions were suggested by folk themes, such as those in *The Legend of the Arkansas Traveler* and the *Hebraic Poems*.

From Childhood came about as a result of McDonald's visit to Philadelphia Orchestra harpist Edna Phillips' home. She was singing old English nursery rhymes to her children while improvising accompaniments on the harp. McDonald suggested that a suite based on the songs would make a good piece, which led Phillips and her husband to commission him to write one. The first movement quotes *I saw three ships* and *Lavender's blue*; the second features *The jolly miller* and *Three blind mice*; while the third combines references to *There was a lady loved a swine*, *Oranges and lemons* and *St. Paul's steeple*.

Interest in performing and recording McDonald's works waned after his death on March 30, 1955 in Princeton, New Jersey. Although Ormandy conducted *The Santa Fé Trail* as late as 1971, no new recordings of McDonald's compositions have appeared in nearly 60 years, and reissues of earlier ones have been sparse. The Stokowski and Koussevitzky sides were released on CD in the early 1990s, but Ormandy's recordings of *The Santa Fé Trail* and *Cakewalk* have not been seen since the LP era, while the *Hebraic Poems* and *From Childhood* have never previously been reissued. It is hoped that the current release will spark a new interest in this neglected composer.

Mark Obert-Thorn

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The Music of Harl McDonald

Symphony No. 1, "The Santa Fé Trail"

Two Hebraic Poems

Cakewalk

San Juan Capistrano

Rhumba

Dance of the Workers

The Legend of the Arkansas Traveler

From Childhood (with Edna Phillips, harp)

Eugene Ormandy

Leopold Stokowski

Harl McDonald

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Serge Koussevitzky

Boston Symphony Orchestra

Victor Studio Recordings - 1935-41

Obert-Thorn

THE MUSIC OF *Harl McDonald*

Symphony No. 1, "The Santa Fé Trail" (1932)

- 1 1st mvt. - The Explorers (In the Desert; In the Mountains) (8:14)
- 2 2nd mvt. - The Spanish Settlements (5:42)
- 3 3rd mvt. - The Wagon-Trains of the Pioneers (5:51)

Two Hebraic Poems (from Three Poems on Aramaic Themes) (1935)

- 4 Hebraic Poem No. 1 (4:00)
- 5 Hebraic Poem No. 2 (3:17)

- 6 Cakewalk (Scherzo from Symphony No. 4, 1937) (3:57)

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Eugene Ormandy*

San Juan Capistrano – Two Evening Pictures (1938)

- 7 1. The Mission (4:44)
- 8 2. Fiesta (4:27)

Boston Symphony Orchestra *Serge Koussevitzky*

- 9 Rhumba (Scherzo from Symphony No. 2, "The Rhumba", 1934) (3:41)

- 10 Dance of the Workers (from Festival of the Workers, 1932) (3:03)

- 11 The Legend of the Arkansas Traveler (1939) (4:40)

Alexander Hilsberg *violin*

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Leopold Stokowski*

From Childhood – Suite for Harp and Orchestra (1940)

- 12 1st Mvt. - Allegro moderato (6:40)
- 13 2nd Mvt. - Molto moderato (7:30)
- 14 3rd Mvt. - Allegro moderato ma vigorosamente (6:20)

Edna Phillips *Harp*

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Harl McDonald*



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Restoration Engineer:
Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on photographs
of **Harl McDonald** and the Mission at
San Juan Capistrano

Full details of source recording catalogue
and matrix numbers are available at
www.pristineclassical.com/pasc402.html

Special thanks to Nathan Brown and Charles
Niss for providing source material

Total duration: **72:06**

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