



Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker

A program by Eden Valley Enterprises (<http://edenvalleyenterprises.org/progdesc/gatewood/gtwdinf.htm>)

If you're interested in music and Ohio composers, check out Rick Sowash's CD "Music For The Appalachian Trail" Rick is an accomplished musician, composer AND storyteller with several books to his name. His book HEROES OF OHIO includes a story about Emma Gatewood!

Hear his WMRA Interview: "Four Places on the Appalachian Trail" at <http://www.sowash.com/recordings/index.html> (To hear the interview, find the window, on the right, headlined: "WMRA Interview: Four Places on the Appalachian Trail" and click on the little "play" triangle in the window.)



Program notes for "Four Places on the Appalachian Trail"

I. Amicalola Falls - Allegro

II. Dragon's Tooth - Allegro energico

III. Sage's Ravine - Larghetto

IV. Katahdin - Molto allegro

In this suite, I have tried to create musical gestures to convey feelings I have about four specific sites on the trail. The four movements -- entitled Amicalola, Dragon's Tooth, Sage's Ravine and Katahdin -- are named after four of the trail's outstanding features. These are depicted in the order a hiker would encounter them if hiking south to north.

I have actually visited Amicalola Falls and scrambled up those wet slippery stairs to watch the ever-fascinating cascades of water plunging downward. And, more than that, I have heard the A.T.'s 'call of adventure' (there are a lot of "horn calls" in the opening movement), never more clearly than there at Amicalola Falls where so many would-be thru-hikers set out with high hopes of reaching Katahdin, away off in Maine. That's why the musical motive representing Katahdin is present in the very opening bar of the first movement; that's why it's 'hidden' or implicit, not stated directly. As a matter of fact, it's sort of upside down and the order of the notes has been shuffled -- to my way of thinking, it makes sense that the southern end of the trail and the beginning of the piece would present those notes in the opposite way from how they're going to occur when they are heard again in the music depicting the northern end of the trail and the end of the piece. Further, to emphasize the opposite ends of the trail and the piece, the descending, cascading figure evokes the waterfalls, while the Katahdin motive, when it finally emerges at the beginning of the last movement is a jagged, rising figure. But there is a definite aural similarity between the two -- it's still the A.T., just opposite ends. There is a 'moonlight' section in the first movement, in a rapid 5/4 time. It has a floating, meter-less character, a beautiful contrast to the four-square, rather stoney music on either side of it.

The entire suite is built upon two motives -- one is the Katahdin motive, already mentioned, and the other I call a 'soaring hawk' motive -- a rising figure that appears in all four movements, though in different guises. For example, in the second movement, when the dragon soars, it is to the music of the 'soaring hawk' motive.

I've hiked up to Dragon's Tooth, in Virginia. What a place it is! A lot of energy is required to get there; it's steep going. The music has a lot of energy, too. It's meant to be ferociously energetic, what one would expect from a really roused-up dragon!

Throughout the piece, there is an emphasis on the grand vistas from the mountaintops, the big views you get from the crest of the A.T., but I have also included many quieter, intimate moments, to express those moments when we stop hiking to gaze in wonder at the gray-green and saffron-colored lichen on the rocks or at a single delicate spider's web or the ferns dripping with buttery dew in the slanting, yellow morning light. The gray, rainy days of introspection are expressed here, too. The A.T. offers much more besides panoramic vistas.

The A.T. experience is not only about Nature; it's also about good people. When I've hiked the trail, I've had all manner of little kindnesses extended to me by strangers. It's just grand. No turf to be defended. No hint as to who earns more than whoever else, who drives a fancier car, who lives in a more expensive neighborhood. I like trail people, and not just for their democratic tendencies, but also for their philosophy, their sage-like wisdom, which brings me to the third movement, "Sage's Ravine."

Since it is in New England (precisely on the border of CT and MA), I like to think of Sage's Ravine as a place where sages are to be found, New England sages like Emerson and Thoreau, and present-day sages, namely hikers. A sage reconciles opposites: joy and sorrow, good and evil, the sacred and the profane, the serene and the agitated, the comic and the tragic. The A.T. brings some people to sagacity -- or it could be that some people who are already sages are attracted to the trail -- but that wisdom is what this movement is about, more than about the actual trees and rocks of that particular cleft in the mountains. I have been to Sage's Ravine and remember it fondly as a beautiful place.

I have viewed Katahdin, but only from the distance. For me, as for most A.T. enthusiasts, Katahdin remains a distant dream, an ideal not yet reached and perhaps never to be reached. I tried to present Katahdin in this piece as being both a distant ideal and also a very immediate, rough and rugged reality. The music is meant to be both very steep and rocky though also very beautiful.

The very end of the Katahdin movement combines all the work's motives in one grand final gesture. It has, I hope, the feeling of tremendous closure that must come to a thru-hiker looking out from the top of Katahdin, and looking inward, too, nourished by the memories of what they have experienced, how they have been transformed.

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