

Premiere of the PBS Emmy Winning *The Song & the Slogan Performance Documentary*



WILL-TV photo filming on location

PROGRAM NOTES

by Composer [Daniel Steven Crafts](#)

The Prairie was Carl Sandburg's ode to the Midwest. Far more than the miles of corn and wheat fields, one sees from the highway, this is a land teeming with story. We hear not only the voice of the poet, but the voice of the prairie itself, chronicling the earth from its geological origins to its cradling of the development of mankind. Sandburg considered himself a poet of the people and his work is more influenced by the traditions of folk-poetry than the academic currents of the time. The music of [The Song & the Slogan](#) attempts to mirror that tendency in drawing upon melodies which sound as if they may have been folk tunes.

The piece begins with a soft chord in the piano--sunrise on the prairie. The cello then adds a short phrase--the vague outlines of shapes as the illumination of the landscape begins. The piano chord is heard again an octave higher and lower—THE PRAIRIE—it goes on forever! As the sun rises, we hear phrases from the cello and winds as more shapes begin to emerge from the darkness.

The narrative, the SONG, is sung by many voices. It tells of the clash of Indian and European attitudes toward life; it looks on with indifference at the folly of war; but most of all, it sings of the hope that human beings are capable of creating a new world both just and peaceful. With the line "I speak of new cities and new people," Sandburg projects his own hope for the future. As a socialist, he believed that a movement beyond the limitations of capitalism and the rule of money held the key to a more egalitarian society, if only the restrictive prejudices of the past could be shed. He was particularly fond of the phrase "The past is a bucket of ashes," having used it several times in other works as well.

The middle section of the work taken from the poem "The Road and the End" is for voice and piano alone, giving it a stark contrast from the more "colorful" beginning and ending sections. It is very personal, and very introspective. The final section of the work, the SLOGAN (the word used in its original meaning of "battle-cry") gives what Sandburg believed to be the credo of Abraham Lincoln. Undoubtedly it was Sandburg's as well.

While the passage may seem to be in the negative ("against this, against that"), it is actually an optimism that humankind can break out of the cycles of exploitation, oppression, and war. The music is likewise intended to be optimistic in character. The poet's political views were never presented with more heart-felt passion. Well - known for his speeches of social protest accompanied with folk song, Sandburg began a tradition carried on by such figures as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. His critique of the injustice inherent in a capitalist social system is as apt today as it was then.

The piece ends as it began, with the piano chord of "The Prairie" while the instruments, particularly the cello replay their individual phrases. But, we do not hear the music in the same way, just as we cannot look at the corn fields with the same indifference having heard the prolific and inexhaustible story just told to us.

[The Song & the Slogan](#) was very much a collaborative effort between Jerry Hadley and myself. Mr. Hadley selected nearly all the text and he did so with the ear of a composer, choosing from among many poems, which while excellent in themselves, do not readily set to music. His suggestions were always made with the utmost sensitivity to the text. Without his unwavering support and loyalty, this project never would have come to fruition.

Thanks must also go to the University of Illinois School of Music, The College of Fine and Applied Arts, WILL-TV, and most particularly to the relentless organizational expertise of our cellist [Barbara Hedlund](#) over the last three years.

Source <http://www.dscrafts.net/notes.html>