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“Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder”: Music Inspired by the Hill Cumorah

Roger L. Miller


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A varied body of musical works inspired by the Hill Cumorah’s prophetic history attests to the dramatic and emotional appeal of this great landmark of Mormonism. The author surveys a variety of musical works, including compositions, anthems, hymns, oratorios, plays, operas, and musicals, that show a wealth of musical potential in the Hill Cumorah’s history. Despite the variety and quality of works composed thus far, the author considers the potential largely untapped and hopes that the music of Cumorah has only just begun.
“Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder”

Music inspired by The Hill Cumorah

— Roger L. Miller —
And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. —Revelation 14:6

Whether it be the music of a lovely spring morning ringing through a nearby grove or the gilded statue of Moroni trumpeting the everlasting gospel to all the world, as in St. John’s revelation, music, it seems, is never far from “Cumorah’s lonely hill.”¹ A surprisingly varied body of musical works inspired by the hill’s prophetic history, ranging from Parley P. Pratt’s well-known “An Angel from on High”² to the music of the famous Hill Cumorah pageant “America’s Witness for Christ,”³ attests to the dramatic and emotional appeal of this great landmark of Mormonism.⁴
Recently, several Latter-day Saint composers were invited to submit keyboard compositions for a recording project conceived around the general theme “Pictures at a Mormon Exhibition.” For his part, pianist Reid Nibley chose an 1893 painting, *Hill Cumorah,* by Alfred Lambourne. The Lambourne painting, Nibley explains, gives me pretty much the same feeling as my piano piece—tempestuous movement, harmonic colors shifting from dark to light and sudden changes in dynamics. There are unlimited possibilities for a story to go with the painting and music but the very name “Cumorah” opens our imagination to the incredible events that occurred there.

The painting, which is prominently displayed in a central hallway of the Salt Lake Temple, is not only a brilliant and compelling witness to the power of art in the service of faith but also a bold piece of religious symbolism. The time appears to be early fall, perhaps late September. Faded meadow grass carpets the ground beneath trees and bushes in various stages of muted autumn color. Stark and lonely, the gray summit thrusts upward, dividing its sky into fields of blue-white radiance and troubled, sinister darkness. On one side, light appears to burst from the hillside; on the other, a violent storm threatens as jagged streaks of lightning pierce the roiling clouds. No human object interrupts the awe-some landscape, except for telling glimpses of a rail fence virtually buried and unnoticed in the sublime vision. Beneath its anxious exterior, what would seem to be a modernist nature painting is nothing less than a metaphorical drama of the restoration of the gospel, with Joseph Smith and the angel Moroni barely out of view. Extensions of the metaphor come easily to mind: the ominous shadow of two fratricidal battles fought either here or at some faraway namesake of this place, the precious plates and the heavy loneliness of the man who bore them here, and the ancient stick of Joseph speaking to our day as “a voice from the dust.”

Theodore E. Curtis’s “Hail Cumorah, Silent Wonder,” a verbal analogue to Lambourne’s painting, seems to have captured the intense drama as well as the quiet majesty of this sacred place:

Hail Cumorah, silent wonder
Of the hidden ages gone,
Lo, the footprints of the thunder
Bares your treasure to the dawn,
And Moroni clothed in glory,
Crows your visage as of old,
To reveal the ancient story
Written on your heart of gold.
Twice a people’s last protection,
Twice a witness of the world
In the arms of insurrection,
To prophetic ruin hurled.
Ramah, of the ancient nation,
Dawns thy glorious day at last.
From your bosom comes salvation
And the story of the past.

The first stanza envisions the Hill Cumorah as we know it today, with Moroni’s handsome statue crowning its crest, while the second stanza neatly summarizes Book of Mormon history. Not surprisingly, the poem’s vivid imagery has attracted several musical settings. Hugh Dougall’s setting, for example, was included in the 1927 hymnal. This linkage between visual art, refined poetic word, and music underlies this survey of music inspired by Cumorah, a survey that is at once brief, tantalizing, and brimming with optimism about our musical future.

**Hymns and the Hill Cumorah**

Recently, Karen Lynn Davidson traced “the influence of the Book of Mormon through more than a century and a half of Mormon hymnody” (from *Emma Smith’s 1835 Collection of Sacred Hymns* to the 1985 *Hymns*). By Davidson’s criteria only 19 hymns published in the official hymnals of the church could be uniquely tied to the Book of Mormon. Even fewer mentioned the Hill Cumorah directly: “An Angel Came Down from the Mansions of Glory,” by William W. Phelps; “I Have No Home. Where Shall I Go?” by Lucy Smith; “An Angel from On High,” by Parley P. Pratt, and two of his lesser known hymns, “Hark! ye mortals. Hist! be still” and “When Earth in Bondage Long Had Lain.” First published in the unofficial hymnal known as Little and Gardner (1844), the last hymn’s 10 original stanzas attempt a summary of the entire restored gospel, with perhaps the earliest use of Pratt’s familiar phrase “Cumorah’s lonely hill” in the third stanza (see accompanying sidebar). Lucy Smith’s extensive narrative on the post-destruction tribulations of Moroni is likewise
The Hill Cumorah Monument.
Photo by John Telford © 2004.
typical of the lengthy narrative style practiced by many 19th-century versifiers. William W. Phelps found a sharper Book of Mormon focus for his Cu-
morah hymn (composed in 1835 but dropped from the hymnbooks after 1927):

An angel came down from the mansions of glory,
And told that a record was hid in Cumorah,
Containing our Saviour’s most glorious Gospel,—
And also the cov’nant to gather His people.

A heavenly treasure, a book full of merit,
It speaks from the dust by the power of the Spirit;
A voice from the Saviour that Saints can rely on,
To watch for the day when He brings again Zion.

O listen ye isles, and give ear, ev’ry nation.
For great things await you in this generation,
The kingdom of Jesus in Zion shall flourish,
The righteous will gather, the wicked must perish.
O Israel! O Israel! In all your abidings,
Prepare for your Lord, when you hear these glad tiding.

While hymns of this sort were well received in the church’s first century, Davidson’s study sug-
gested a current need for more “devotional hymns of timeless and universal dignity, personal medita-
tions upon Book of Mormon texts, hymns that pour forth the gratitude and testimony of the writer, in-
viting the congregation to do the same.”

A similar plea was made by Elder Boyd K. Packer in 1976:

Our hymns speak the truth as far as they go.
They could speak more of it if we had more of
them, specifically teaching the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. If I had my way there would be many new hymns with lyrics near scriptural in their power, bonded to music that would inspire people to worship. Think how much we could be helped by another inspired anthem or hymn of the Restoration.¹⁹

Retired Brigham Young University religion professor Rodney Turner’s “What Do We Hear from Cumorah?” (with music by Janice Kapp Perry)²⁰ attempts exactly that. His text adapts the rhetorical format of Joseph Smith’s 1842 doctrinal “epistle” (Doctrine and Covenants 128), written from Nauvoo to encourage and energize the Saints during this difficult period:

And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed.²¹

Formulated as a concise refrain, the hymn’s title begins each of its three stanzas:

What do we hear from Cumorah? From its heights holy prophets of old Witness with power and plainness Of Jesus, on plates of gold. Their message is truth everlasting, The truth that shall save each soul Who, hearing the call of the Shepherd, Repents and seeks rest in His fold.

What do we hear from Cumorah? From its heart humble servants proclaim Men are alike unto heaven, As children of God, the same. Restored is the gospel of gladness, With joy we can now exclaim “The burden of sin has been lifted Because of our faith in Christ’s name.”

What do we hear from Cumorah? From on high speaks the voice of the Son Off’ring to all life eternal Through Him who denieth none, With Joseph’s word joined unto Judah, Their witnesses stand as one, The gospel goes forth to the nations The work of salvation begun!

There is much to admire in Turner’s rhetorical concept, even with its minor problems. Especially noteworthy is the three-part sequence: “From its heights” (repentance), “From its heart” (forgiveness), and “From on high” (salvation and eternal life).

Nowhere is the doctrine of salvation through Christ more succinctly stated than in Moroni’s final address to the Gentiles, written shortly before the plates were buried:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall . . . love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that . . . ye may be perfect in Christ. (Moroni 10:32)

A frequent source of texts, this eloquent passage with its concise invitation to “Come unto Christ” has inspired a number of works of that title, including Reid Nibley’s recent anthem “Come unto Christ,” for chorus and organ (2000).²² Closely related are the many works based on the recurrent “voice from the dust” metaphor, with its direct connection to Cumorah, as in Moroni 10:27:

And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?²³

Among the several interesting works on this theme, Henry Evans Giles’s anthem “The Truth Has Spoken from the Dust” was composed for the 100th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s receiving the plates from the angel Moroni, which was observed with programs and ceremonies throughout the church.²⁴ President Heber J. Grant marked the occasion with a visit to the Hill Cumorah on 22 September 1927. Wards and stakes held commemorative services the following Sunday, 25 September, and a special program arranged by Tabernacle organist Edward P. Kimball aired that evening on KSL radio.²⁵ Giles’s anthem (composed for the Ensign Stake) contains four divisions—Chorus, Chant, Chorale, Finale—and bears the ceremonial trappings of a British coronation anthem, opening with a fugal song of praise and concluding with a brief “Amen” chorus. Only the second section (Chant) refers specifically
to the work’s title, with an explicit nod to Moroni’s symbolic trumpet:

The truth has spoken from the dust
And righteousness from heav’n come forth;
The fullness of the everlasting Gospel
Shall now resound through all the earth.
Give ear unto the Angel’s call.
His trumpet sounding long and loud.
Ye nations, kindreds, tongues, and empires all
Prepare to meet the Lord, your God.

A more recent treatment of this theme, Merrill Bradshaw’s avant-garde “A Voice from the Dust”²⁶ (composed in 1978 for a cappella choir), could hardly have been more different. At first glance, its text—a gloss on Isaiah 29, treating the future redemption of Jerusalem—seems to harbor only distant echoes of Cumorah. A closer reading, however, reveals that the real theme is the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and restoration of the gospel in the last days:

Jerusalem, thou holy city far above value
Have no more heaviness and sorrow
For the word of the Lord cometh to thee from a far land
Whispering low out of the dust
With a familiar spirit out of the ground.
(Isaiah 29:1–6)

Dream no more of food! Eat!
Eat what the Lord sendeth that thy soul be not empty.
Think no more of thirst! Drink!
Drink of the waters of life that ye be filled,
For the Lord doeth a marvelous work and a wonder.
(Isaiah 29:8, 13–14)

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Hear the words of the book from the dust! (Isaiah 29:11–12)
Israel! Israel!
See his great work made without hands!
(Daniel 2:34)

Jerusalem!
The Lord speaketh, who shall not hear?
The Lord sendeth, who shall not receive?
The Lord worketh, who shall not be astonished?
(Isaiah 29:18–24)

Rejoice! O Israel!
Jerusalem, Thy salvation is nigh.

A number of avant-garde techniques support the poetic imagery. For example, the syllables JERUSALEM, which begin the piece, are intoned by “slow, intense” tone clusters underscored by vocal sonorities of indistinct pitch and shape, creating a deliberate feeling of remoteness and estrangement. Inchoate whispers (“whispering low out of the dust”) gradually form coherent words, finally emerging as full-voiced, pitched sounds at the text “out of the ground.” After a bout of “frenzied” counterpoint, all the voices climax in unison, shouting, “Rejoice, O Israel! Rejoice, O Israel!” before coming full circle to the sounds of the opening on the text, “Jerusalem, Thy salvation is nigh.” In a related piece, “The Vision of Ezekiel”²⁷ (composed for the BYU A Cappella Choir and the Israel Chamber Orchestra), Bradshaw reverted to more traditional musical language for his treatment of the stick of Joseph and stick of Judah theme. Again, the connection to Cumorah might seem tangential, until we realize that Ezekiel 37:16–27 is the key to the unrelenting importance that Book of Mormon writers attach to the Old Testament patriarch Joseph, who by name and covenant links the ancient patriarchal order with the remnant of the house of Israel through a modern Joseph at Cumorah.²⁸ It is hard to resist commenting on current BYU composer Christian Asplund’s several hundred innovative hymns, composed primarily as a personal expres-
Some require a cultivated ear, but several are surprisingly accessible despite their modern propensities. “And now I, Moroni” (Ether 12:38–41)—a mildly dissonant choral recitative for male voices—is especially effective. A solemn loneliness infuses the chantlike chords, which in their expressive neutrality (static harmony and dynamics, minimal melodic motion) emphasize the pure power of Moroni’s testimony.

Imaginative works of this sort show how modernist and even avant-garde techniques can be effectively employed in dramatic and rhetorical contexts. It is generally assumed that audiences have not kept pace with the rhetoric of modern music, but if—as here—the context is clear and the purpose convincing, the effect can be exactly right.

**Dramatic Works**

The Book of Mormon presents many opportunities to go beyond tradition in the portrayal of what Davidson describes as its “stirring oratory, thought-provoking figures of speech and distinctive turns of phrase.” One could add to these its rich narrative, compelling adventures, and intense drama. Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy was among the first to have a substantial vision of music and drama as a means of telling the Book of Mormon story.

As a young journalist, he wrote stories about Moroni, sketched a “Nephite Republic,” and created “a fictionalized and heightened account of the life of Alma’s son Corianton,” later adapted as a play that “found its way from the Salt Lake Theater to Broadway.” His purpose was to show that “Book of Mormon characters have flesh-and-blood counterparts in our own day and in our own interior lives.”

In 1923, as president of the Eastern States Mission, Roberts “set up an elaborate celebration” to mark the 100th anniversary of Joseph Smith’s first encounter with the angel Moroni. A dramatic oration that he prepared for the occasion was hailed by the press as “a sweeping vision with the power of a Nordic saga” and a “graphic panorama of the past”—perhaps the earliest intimation of what a Book of Mormon pageant might be. As the 1930 centennial of the church’s founding approached, Roberts “dreamed of a major motion picture with a script built upon one or more of the epic civilizations portrayed in the book.” The movie was not to be, but in 1937 his dream was realized in an even more significant way, with the first performance of a gigantic outdoor drama on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah. For its first 20 years, the pageant relied on excerpts from works by Wagner and Tchaikovsky, but in 1957 an original musical score was performed and recorded by BYU choruses and the Utah Symphony Orchestra in the Salt Lake Tabernacle under the direction of the composer, Crawford Gates. Now, it is impossible for anyone who has seen “America’s Witness for Christ” not to think of Gates’s spectacular score resounding across the woods and farmlands of upstate New York.

Significantly, Elder Roberts’s ideas served as a kind of manifesto for a new generation of Latter-day Saint artists. One who seems to have taken his ideas seriously was BYU English professor Clinton F. Larson, whose poetic drama *Coriantumr* and its companion piece *Moroni* attracted much attention in the early 1960s. These plays, according to the foreword by Marden J. Clark, “mark a milestone in the use . . . of strictly Mormon, especially Book of Mormon, material” for serious dramatic purposes. “So far as I know,” Clark writes, “Mr. Larson is the first artist of any kind to exploit the tragic potential in the parallel destructions of the peoples of Jared and Nephi recorded in the Book of Mormon.” The language is truly life-like . . . in its ability to suggest, to embody, even to create life in its depths, its totality, its ramifications, its emotional richness. Larson is able to skirt the didacticism that has plagued so much of Mormon literature while still making use of “the religious, moral, and ethical affirmations that are the heart of the Book of Mormon.” He treats both the Jaredite Coriantumr and the Nephite Moroni as tragic figures whose lives, because they are intertwined
with nations of divine destiny, have transcendent, universal appeal. In Clark’s view the plays achieve universality by stressing not “undeserved suffering and evil,” but rather the “regenerative effects of suffering” through the atonement of Christ. Rarely, he says, have artistic mastery and spiritual power come together with such force as when, at the end of the second play, Moroni addresses the prophet Joseph from out of the past:

Joseph, I reach to you!
I reach to you from Sherrizah! He who was slain
By the Jews lived among us!
Joseph, we lived!
Ask if we have not lived!

My people, my people, let the Word raise you from the dead.⁴⁰

In the end Clark pleads not only for these plays to be performed but for more of their kind to be written:

Their very existence and publication challenges Church members to rise to a cultural level at which, if not these plays, then at least similarly honest attempts at real art from Mormon materials will get the kind of hearing they deserve.⁴¹

Such a challenge could not go unanswered. Fresh from a doctorate in composition at the University of Illinois, a young Merrill Bradshaw was just beginning his long and productive career at BYU when Larson’s plays were published. The two men became warm friends and intellectual comrades, sharing common aesthetic and spiritual perspectives about art in the church. A piano and vocal score found among Bradshaw’s papers at BYU may be his initial probe into Larson’s dramatic world. Entitled “Sarah’s Soliloquy,” it is a setting of the opening scene of Larson’s Coriantumr.⁴² In this play Larson’s elevated poetic prose examines the psychology of denial and despair that must have plagued the last days of the Jaredites (see Ether 12–15). As the play opens, the Jaredites have fought themselves almost to oblivion, and once again the separate factions (one led by Shiz, the other by Coriantumr) have gone out to senseless battle. The scene begins with Coriantumr’s wife, Sarah, holding an imaginary conversation with her son Mahonri. In her delusion, Sarah has convinced herself that Mahonri has not been involved in the fighting but is only just back from a day of hunting; in fact, he has joined the fighting and does not seem to be present as she speaks:

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(Scene: Near the hill Ramah on the North American continent, in the fourth century before the birth of Christ. The time is late autumn. There is a cave to the right. In the center is a table; against the table rests a sword, upon which the light is particularly intense. In the posture of SARAH, who is alone, there is the hint of calamity.)

SARAH (Clearing the table)
Mahonri, your father will be here soon.
Sheath your sword; your work is done today.

(Abstractedly)

There is enough food to last for many days;
Yet you bring more here to surfeit us,
And we eat or it spoils in the bright sun.

(Now humming)

Your sword, Mahonri—how could you hunt today? . . .

(Grasping reality)
What am I thinking of? Or was the sun but the glint
Of a jeweled scabbard somewhere near? . . .

(Looking, then fondling the cross of the sword)
Ah, the sacrifice of this time, that we are lonely,
Just a few in this expanse of light and heat,
Alone as the unbending trees. And we fight, run—
And fight again. The days of our traveling here, are heavy.

(CORIANTUMR enters with three soldiers, all breathing heavily. Their swords are streaked with blood.⁴³

Sarah’s pensive and distracted mood changes are reflected in the disjunct contours of Bradshaw’s skillful counterpoint and in the piano’s mildly dissonant harmonies. Both musically and dramatically, he seems to have found an uncompromising—yet

Book of Mormon dramatist Clinton F. Larson. Photo courtesy of the Larson family.
accessible—musical voice to match this challenging poetry. But the venture never gets beyond this first scene. Usually when a large artistic project grinds to a halt, it does so in midcourse, leaving a residue of notes, sketches, outlines, and so on, but not in this case; all that remains is this one promising score, and then—nothing. That Bradshaw went on to conclude many other lengthy and difficult projects suggests that this was a matter of choice. After all, a good poem has its own music, and Larson’s is powerful poetry. Perhaps this initial encounter was enough to convince him that he had nothing further to add. Did Bradshaw, as others, find Larson’s poetry too leaden, too grand for a musical setting? Or did he simply outgrow his early enthusiasm as his ideas matured in other directions?¹⁴ The reasons are of little consequence, except that they indicate the difficulty any artist is likely to encounter in creating a serious work of this magnitude.

Even in a less ambitious project, there are difficulties. Newell Dayley’s Moroni (based on a script by Ralph G. Rodgers) was presented in the summer of 1977 in Salt Lake City’s Salt Palace under the supervision of Elder Mark E. Peterson of the Quorum of the Twelve.¹⁵ Far removed from the epic poetry of Larson’s Moroni, Rodgers’s fictional narrative sets out to humanize the prophet-general Mormon and his house, as suggested in its preface:

Father Mormon is there, as is Moroni’s mother, his young friends, and even his romantic interests, and his enemies in war. . . . “Moroni” peels the gold leaf and bronze from this most fascinating character, and shows us a living, breathing human being—one who has the same concerns about family, about life and happiness as we do.⁴⁶

Its musical-theater format was intended to be both didactic and entertaining: Moroni, though not quite the stereotypical “bishop’s son,” has fallen for the wrong girl—a self-centered beauty queen—while the “girl next door” languishes unnoticed until, in a typical showtune duet (“When did love arrive?”), he awakens to himself through her and accepts his role in the world for what it really is. As the tragedy of the Nephite destruction plays out, Moroni finds himself alone with the sacred record, and the show ends with an epilogue picturing Joseph Smith and the resurrected angel Moroni on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah. Quintessential Mormon musical theater, Moroni was well received. But a work of this sort issues challenges unique to itself, challenges that have yet to be successfully met: Can characters of whom we know so little be endowed with flesh and blood without becoming caricatures? Can an entertainment medium such as musical theater, or even the more artistically serious medium of opera, create a believable context for the serious message of the Book of Mormon? Two projected works seek to answer yes.


The recently announced By the Hand of Mormon: Scenes from the Land of Promise hopes to achieve those very goals. A collaboration between highly experienced professionals—composer Sam Cardon, librettist David Piler, and artist Walter Rane—it promises to take the Book of Mormon musical to the level of a Broadway production. As in previous attempts, the goal is to make Book of Mormon figures come to life as real people, in their own environment, with something approximating authentic music, costuming, sets, and so on, with the hope that seeing into “their hearts and their lives can help point us to the Savior.”⁴⁷ Another dramatic work with direct ties to Cumorah is Crawford Gates’s recent opera Joseph! Joseph!, on the life of Joseph Smith. Covering the entire length and meaning of the Prophet’s life, Joseph! Joseph! also attempts a realistic portrait. It remains to be seen whether it is more challenging to re-create a well-documented historical person than to construct an artificial life for epic characters about whose personal life little is known. Both approaches hold out promise, but the challenge is to find the right combination of spiritual insight and artistic genius.⁴⁸
For what might seem obvious reasons, oratorio and similar types of unstaged musical drama have also held a strong appeal for Latter-day Saint composers. Leroy Robertson’s *Oratorio from the Book of Mormon*⁴⁹ was the first major work of this kind. Its focus was the prophecies and ministry of Christ to the Nephites, as recorded in Helaman and 3 Nephi, and its success inspired other major Book of Mormon works.⁵⁰ One of these was Rowan Taylor’s *Coriantumr*⁵¹ for four-part mixed chorus, soloists, and orchestra, which premiered in the East Los Angeles Stake Center in 1960. Like Larson’s play, the oratorio follows the evolution of the downfall of the Jaredites, as Coriantumr encounters the stratagems of his various nemeses in the region around ancient Ramah/Cumorah. Its text, taken directly from the book of Ether, relies on the inherent poetry of Mormon’s redaction, with its authentic structure, inflection, and cadence. With this effort, Taylor—a professor of composition at Pierce College in Los Angeles—demonstrated that uncompromising works of more than limited appeal can be drawn from Book of Mormon materials and that Latter-day Saint composers who want to write seriously can create opportunities of their own accord.

Darwin Wolford’s oratorio *The Land of Joseph,*⁵² on a libretto by Marylou Cunningham Shaver (commissioned by Ricks College in 1976 for the American bicentennial), portrays a sweeping vision of America’s religious history. The oratorio, which concludes with Moroni’s final words of warning at Cumorah, has the unifying theme that the “land of promise” can only be possessed by a righteous people. The narrow patriotic focus connecting the “land of promise” with the United States undoubtedly limits the potential of this work. More universally appealing is Wolford’s *Song from Cumorah,* a cantata for children’s chorus, with narration and lyrics by Mabel Jones Gabbott.⁵³ The cantata unfolds around important Book of Mormon topics, each narration reinforced with a song, as in this example from the finale:

> The stories we have told are in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was translated from the plates which the angel Moroni took from the Hill Cumorah. Joseph Smith translated the record, which is *an account written by the hand of Mormon; wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, and of the people of Jared—and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentiles to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.*

I heard the voices ringing
In tones of mighty worth,
From men whose words had waited
Long hidden in the earth.
When fools no longer hearken
And cry that Christ is dead.
Lo! Nephi tells his story;
And Moroni’s word is read.

I heard the voices singing,
Of miracles, of prayer,
Of Christ alive, but wounded,
Of angels gathered there;
When men again are seeking
A hope against the night.
His words will be their comfort,
His love will make things right.

The delightful children’s series *Musical Adventures in the Book of Mormon* (formerly *The Wonderful Book of Gold*), by Melanie Hoffman and Marvin Payne, takes an entirely different approach to children and the Book of Mormon, replacing seriousness with whimsy. The characters, including three children and their dog, present the Book of Mormon in a way that is natural, accurate, and instructive to both children and adults. Set in the children’s treehouse, each of the 30 episodes is a skit beginning with dialogue, followed by a cleverly arranged song. “All the Folks on Nephi’s Boat,” for example, is a sea chantey, while the “Murmur Song” makes skillful use of irony and musical cliché to mock the futility and lack of faith evident in the constant bickering of Lehi’s rebellious family:

> Murmur in the morning. Murmur at night.
> Murmur to the left. Murmur to the right.
> They murmured up and down the desert sand:
> They murmured all the way to the—PROMised land.

The children ask questions and reason out solutions based on their own level of experience. Episodes are sequential, so the accounts of Mormon abridging the record and of Moroni burying the plates in the Hill Cumorah conclude the story of *The Wonderful Book of Gold.*⁵⁴
Steven Kapp Perry and Brad Wilcox’s *From Cumorah’s Hill,* written in a popular medium geared for young adults, works best as a cantata or concert piece. It was conceived around letters received by the composers addressing issues such as ridicule, intimidation and outright persecution, intellectual challenges, rebellious feelings and actions, and loneliness. Excerpts from the letters are paired with parallel situations in the Book of Mormon, thus providing practical and inspirational answers to the problems of ordinary people who want to live righteously but face overwhelming personal challenges.

“Voices from the Dust,” a (1990) stake production written by former KSL-TV news anchor Margaret Smoot, centered around the character Everyman (pretaped and projected onto jumbo television screens) and his search for truth. Interaction between the television character and an onstage family who have shared with him a copy of the Book of Mormon leads to portrayals—some humorous, some serious—of Book of Mormon episodes and doctrinal concepts, along with modern-day testimonials of its truth. Except for an original title song, the music is borrowed, ending with Jeff Goodrich’s “You Can Believe in Christ.” This unique application of television technology was but one way of enhancing an otherwise amateur production that proved both entertaining and inspiring. With today’s even more advanced technologies, the potential for this kind of creativity is virtually boundless.

**A Music Only Just Begun**

What began as a comprehensive survey of music inspired by the Hill Cumorah became, in process, a more introspective project, inevitably raising new questions: What constitutes the music of Cumorah? What are the themes associated with its ancient history, its place in the restoration and the early history of the church, its compelling role in the fulfillment of Book of Mormon prophecy, and its modern role in telling the church’s story? How have these various aspects inspired composers and influenced the arts in the church? What has been the response to the Hill Cumorah by the rank and file of the church, in its worship and in the deepening of individual and collective faith? Only gradually, it seems, have we come to realize how vast the possibilities are.

The church moved away from its geographical origins early in its history. Only a small percentage of early church members knew the prophet Joseph’s New York surroundings at first hand. Yet Cumorah was, and is, the symbolic heart of the restoration. It is a tangible connection with the Book of Mormon’s past—its prophets, its heroes, and its message to the world. As this very limited survey has shown, there is a wealth of musical potential in Cumorah’s history, but despite the variety and quality of works composed thus far, it is a potential largely untapped.

There is, however, reason for optimism. First, in terms of its cultural history, the church is still very young; we should remember that it took centuries for Christianity in general to build its impressive artistic legacy. Second, it is always good to recognize that what exists need not limit or prescribe future possibilities. Efforts to create self-consciously Mormon art, however, are probably (and rightly) doomed to failure. The gospel is universal, and one of the great challenges of our generation is to find that universal voice without minimizing or compromising the uniqueness of our mission. Because the gospel embraces all truth—even (and perhaps especially) artistic truth—we need to foster greater confidence in our own creativity as a people. We should consciously and consistently use the arts, as other communities have done, for introspection and exploration to discover and project the very best in ourselves. A real Latter-day Saint art, avoiding the twin plagues of didacticism and narcissism, would provide the impetus for living the gospel richly and vigorously, so that the wellsprings of our experience are full when the Lord would bless us with the gifts of his Spirit. Cumorah’s music ranges from high art to the songs of children, from the deeply serious to the comic. At each level there have been fresh and interesting ideas, although not without challenges and failures. Let us hope that the music of Cumorah, in both a real and a symbolic sense, has only just begun.
1. See Margot Blum Schevill, Costume as Communication: Ethnographic Costumes and Textiles from Middle America and the Central Andes of South America in the Collections of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, Bristol, Rhode Island (Bristol, RI: Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University, 1986), 9.


3. There is a tendency by some Christians to assume too much from archaeology. Sometimes the words confirm, prove, authenticate, and substantiate can be employed. It can be proved that historical conditions were such that Solomon could have been as powerful a king as the Bible says he was; but it does not prove that God gave Solomon wisdom. It can be fairly well substantiated that there was a census when Jesus was born, but this confirmation hardly proves his divinity. No archaeological evidence will ever prove the atonement. It must be recognized that there is a clear separation between historical and theological proof. Alfred J. Hoerth, Archaeology and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 20.


12. See Mormon 1:8–9; Jacob 1:14.

A New Beginning for the Pageant: 1948 to 1951

Harold I. Hansen

1. J. Karl Wood was called to direct the Hill Cumorah Pageant in 1939.

2. Thorpe B. Isacson, in Conference Report, October 1949, 156.


"Hail, Cumorah! Silent Wonder": Music Inspired by the Hill Cumorah

Roger L. Miller

1. "An Angel from on High," Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 13; hereafter Hymns. Latter-day Saint children might also think of one of their favorite songs, "The Golden Plates Lay Hidden," Children's Songbook of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 86.

2. On summer evenings in July and August, thousands gather on the slopes of the Hill Cumorah to

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22. Some contemporary composers have created music for the Book of Mormon, and others for the Book of Mormon restoration.
25. Larson, “Scenes from the Book of Mormon.”
28. Some contemporary composers have created music for the Book of Mormon, and others for the Book of Mormon restoration.
29. Larson, “Scenes from the Book of Mormon.”
31. Larson, “Scenes from the Book of Mormon.”
39. Some may regard this aspect of Clark’s assessment as overly enthusiastic. Larson’s language is epic in cast, not “life-like” in the sense of common, everyday speech. But it is life-affirming and powerful in its ability to project the terrible conflicts that come to each of us as a result of our being “free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death” (2 Nephi 2:27).

40. Larson, Coriantumr, 71.

41. Ibid., 7.

42. Merrill Bradshaw, Coriantumr (1955) (in the opera on a play by Clinton Larson, first scene only: “Sarah’s Söllogeu”), an unpublished voice/piano manuscript copy resides in the Music Division of BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library.

43. Larson, Coriantumr.

44. Bradshaw’s text differs in the last two lines from the published play, which gives the following: “The broad plains and the rivers, alone as the unbearing Trees in the heavy days of our travelling here.”

45. Moroni was the first of three theatrical works sponsored by the Promised Valley Playhouse (at that time a cultural appendage of the church) to educate and inspire through music and drama. The second was on the life of Christ and the third on Joseph Smith.

46. Prefatory note from the script published by the Promised Valley Playhouse, Salt Lake City, 1977.


48. Another recent addition to the genre is Meredith R. Taylor’s genre is Meredith R. Taylor’s Coriantumr, (1955), completed under Robertson’s composition students, Robertson taught at BYU and the University of Utah in the 1930s through the 1960s.

49. See Robertson Wilson, “Leroy Robertson and the era for a Morton’s composition students, Robertson taught at BYU and the University of Utah in the 1930s through the 1960s.

50. Merrill Bradshaw, Coriantumr (1955) in the opera on a play by Clinton Larson, first scene only: “Sarah’s Söllogeu”), an unpublished voice/piano manuscript copy resides in the Music Division of BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library.

51. Rowan Taylor, Coriantumr, manuscript copy, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Taylor’s prolific output also includes several symphonies with Book of Mormon themes, including symphonies 4 and 7, which contain excerpts from Coriantumr.

52. Darwin Wolford, The Land of Joseph, BYU–Idaho, Dept. of Music (Rexburg, ID: unpublished, 1976). Wolford was one of a number of Robertson’s composition students, Robertson taught at BYU and the University of Utah in the 1930s through the 1960s.


57. Jeff Goodrich, I Heard Him Come and Other Songs about the Savior (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book).


59. According to Rebecca Bean’s account, the angel, in response to Torleif’s prayer about which of the seven drawings to take to the Brethren, told him which drawing was the right one. This raises the question of why Torleif presented all seven drawings to the Brethren and not just the designated one. This matter is resolved in the following account: “When the sculptor inquired of the angel how he should confront the Brethren with this choice [the sketch that the angel’s finger pointed to] (inasmuch as they were the ones making the decision), he was instructed that they would choose the one the Lord had chosen.” Rand H. Packer, History of Four Mormon Landmarks in Western New York: The Joseph Smith Farm, Hill Cumorah, the Martin Harris Farm, and the Peter Whitmer, St., Farm (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 31–32.

60. Ibid., 7.

61. Ibid., 7.

62. Merrill Bradshaw, Coriantumr (1955) (in the opera on a play by Clinton Larson, first scene only: “Sarah’s Söllogeu”), an unpublished voice/piano manuscript copy resides in the Music Division of BYU’s Harold B. Lee Library.

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65. There is yet another possibility, one that is always a potential problem when attempting to deal with a fictional mise-en-scène. Perhaps the anachronisms and misconceptions in Larson’s script, laid bare through later research in the second half of the 20th century, ultimately made him uncomfortable with the material.

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