Caverns and Caves Depicted in Music

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Image: Carlsbad Caverns
Music, like film, describes landscapes that either no longer exist, or are imagined by the artist. This is the Colorado river as it appeared recently. The Czech composer, Bedrich Smetana, in his symphonic poem Má vlast (1874), composed music that depicted a rapids scene like this on the Vltava River. The piece is known by its German title, the Moldau.
A portion of “Vltava” reflected St. John’s rapids. The Štěchovice Reservoir, constructed during World War Two, and resulted in a calm and placid waterway. While it may be eons before caverns or arches collapse, the effect is nonetheless there—artists describe what they see at the time.
In 1829, Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) traveled to the Scottish island, Staffa, to personally observe Fingal’s Cave.
Composed in 1830, Hebrides (Hebriden) Overture, also known as Fingal’s Cave, is an eleven minute concert overture in the German romantic style.

As described by Classicfm, “Fingal’s Cave is over sixty metres deep and in stormy tides the cacophonous sounds of the waves inside it rumble out for miles. The intense and rolling melodies within the music perfectly capture this sense of both drama and awe; calmer passages, meanwhile, convey stiller waters and more tranquil surroundings.”

Read more at http://www.classicfm.com/composers/mendelssohn/music/hebrides-overture/#FuyTOFGZgAHRF7EW.99
Carlsbad Caverns are located in southeastern New Mexico. In October 1923, President Calvin Coolidge created Carlsbad Caverns as a National Monument. Congress passed “An Act to establish the Carlsbad Caverns National Park in the State of New Mexico, and for other purposes, approved May 14, 1930 (46 Stat. 279),” which made the monument into a national park in 1930.

Carlsbad Caverns entrance—Peter Jones for the NPS. (left)
Carlsbad Caverns, Eric Gunther, 2003 (right)
Early in the television age, David Broekman composed music for the series “Wide, wide world.” For one episode, on Carlsbad Caverns (1956), he asked two composers at Columbia University, Otto Luening and Vladimir Ussachevsky, to provide electronic sounds. The theme song to the program sounds like standard popular music of the time. The music for the episode about the caverns reflects a more mysterious atmosphere.

Otto Luening (far right), Vladimir Ussachevsky (center)

Sound:
Broekman’s Theme music to Wide, wide world.
Broekman’s Carlsbad Caverns.
The National Park Service has compiled some of the songs written about Mammoth Cave.

Image: Mammoth Cave, by Joe Shlabotnik
Here is a popular song from the 1920s, Come to Mammoth Cave in Old Kentucky.


Sound with this.

Published between 1858 and 1876, when Ditson at 277 Washington St., Boston.

This popular song is a Schottisch, a two rhythm round dance, similar to a polka.

Back cover includes descriptions of Ashland, Oregon: Oregon's famous spa, Crater Lake National Park: Oregon's mountain playground, and Josephine County Caves: Marble halls of Oregon.

http://oregondigital.org/catalog/oregondigital:j6731377h#page/1/mode/1up
This piece, in a waltz like rhythm, is joyful, and the pamphlet advertises the caves in Josephine County.
Newer compositions about caves vary in their medium of performance.

Other caves featured in Music

Jenolan Caves, New South Wales, Australia

- Cresswell, Lyell (Quartet for horn, trombone, tuba, percussion, 1979)
- Hinz, Frank. (Song, 1992)
- Holland, William (Piece for soprano, bass baritone, piano, choir, orchestra, 2000)
- Vick, Robert E. (Jenolan waltz, piano, early 1900s)

Wombeyan Caves (N.S.W), Australia

- Hiscocks, Wendy (Piano music, 2006)
Other caves featured in Music

Dunhuang Caves (China), also known as
Caves of the Thousand Buddhas
Luo, Yonghui (2014)
Wu, Weihao (2014)
Zhang, Peishan (2014)

Dordogne (France)
Brandmüller, Theo. (Organ music, 1995)
A massacre in an Italian cave has inspired at least two composers.

Events in Caves

Ardeatine Caves Massacre, Rome, Italy, 1944
Manzino, Giuseppe. (Choir, with ensemble, 2003)
Schuman, William. (Symphony, no. 9, Le fosse Ardeatine, 1971)
Carlsbad Caverns, Eric Gunther, 2003