Title:	Young People's Concerts Scripts: Charles Ives: American Pioneer [pencil on yellow legal pad paper pad paper, emendation in red pencil]
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YP-TV #3
21 Jan '67

1874 –
– 1954

Ives

[ORK: Gong on Hook & Ladder]
(Prevent applause)

Don't clap. I want to ask you a question:

If you heard that ~~very~~ rather bizarre piece of music without knowing its title or its composer, what would you say it was? Something by a ~~young~~ composer, ~~just beginning to learn his trade~~ from outer space? By a child? Something the orchestra is making up as it goes along? No; you're too smart for that; but I'll bet dollars to doughnuts you'd say it was something modern – in fact very modern, ~~avant garde~~, probably one of those wild musical experiments that the bright, young new composers are making these days. Well, the composer in question ~~Charles Ives~~, is not only not new, but indeed very old, in fact quite dead. ~~for almost 13 years now~~. In fact, the little piece we just heard was written by Charles Ives ~~in the very early years of this century~~, over 50 years ago, in the very ~~earliest~~ first years of this century, before any of the big modern experiments by Schoenberg or Stravinsky had begun to be made. ~~before Schoenberg began to develop his atonal ideas before Stravinsky began to change the face of rhythm~~ Just imagine: in those early 1900's what was called "crazy modern music" ~~meant~~ consisted of Debussy, Ravel, and Richard Strauss – all composers we think of today as pretty stodgy old-timers. And yet, ~~at that~~ in those very same years, ~~tucked away in far-off Danbury, Conn., and~~ this Connecticut Yankee named Ives was madly pursuing his own experimental ideas, which were years ahead of history, writing music that no one

could decipher, no one could play, and no one cared to hear.
~~cared about, or played, or listened to~~. And the more nobody cared, the more he wrote — each piece wilder and more revolutionary than the last. Does this mean that Ives was mad? Not at all; he was a very serious business-man, and a ~~very~~ successful one at that; but his insurance business didn't keep him from spending most of his time writing music — strange pieces like the one we just heard, which is called "The Gong on the Hook and Ladder, or The Firemen's Parade on Main Street". Now even that title sounds a little bit mad — or at least not entirely serious. But you must remember that Ives was both a genius and a pioneer — two kinds of people who ~~are~~ always seem to have a touch of madness — and it's a good kind of madness. Think of our Early American pioneers: weren't they just a bit mad to go trekking westward across a wild continent, exposing ~~willing~~ themselves to ~~victims of~~ Indians, hunger, storms and bandits? Well, Ives was very much like them. ~~a willing victim of misunderstanding, and negligence and indifference~~. He was an adventurer, too — a musical pioneer. Nothing could stop him.

~~Genius? Pioneer? mad? sporting?~~

But really to understand Ives, or any adventurer — in the Far West or in far-out music — we must remember that the spirit of adventure is just another way of saying the spirit of play, the sporting instinct — doing things ~~just~~ simply for the fun of doing them. Now, I think that word fun is ~~very~~ unjustly belittled; ~~much put down, I think~~; it's a wonderful word; and I believe it applies just as much to music as to roller-coaster rides or swimming or movies or sex.

And once you get the idea of how important fun was in Ives' mind, ~~and in his music,~~ then you begin to hear his music with new ears. And you understand why that Firemen's Parade piece we just played is so freakish; for instance, why there are so many different rhythms going on in the orchestra at the same time that it sounds as if everyone is lost. Why? Because it's fun, that's all. And ~~becau~~ also because, if you're trying to make a musical picture of a Firemen's Parade down Main Street, and you've got a gong banging away on the big shiny red Hook-and-Ladder, what better way is there to show the noise and confusion and general hilarity than to have all those different rhythms going at once?

[ORK: 2 before Ⓖ, 1 bar + dbt ⊙]

And it's not just the rhythms. What about those notes — those howling dissonances? They're also part of the fun, of the general ~~spirit of hilarity~~ hilarious goings-on. And this spirit of fun also explains why, amidst all the confusion, there suddenly emerges that innocent & plaintive old time, "My Darlin' Clementine" —

[ORK: Ⓖ to end]

And so the piece ends, in a fizzle, like a wet firecracker. Again, why? Did everyone run home because it suddenly began to rain? I doubt it. Was it all just a dream from which we have awoken with a fuzzy head? Perhaps.

But actually it's just Ives having fun, doing the unexpected, ~~the~~ one might even say the funnyely unsuccessful — ending his piece by good-naturedly thumbing his nose at his listeners. [They weren't listening anyway; what did he care? You know, I am sure Ives never once heard this piece performed; & as far as I know few, if any other people have either.]

Poss. cut

check

Now I don't want you to get the idea that Ives' music is all jokes and games, like this piece. He wrote four very serious symphonies, endless numbers of songs, a mystical piano sonata that lasts an hour; but in every piece of his, ~~in one way or~~ however serious it may be, in one way or another we find this spirit of fun — whether it shows itself in kooky rhythms, or in dissonant notes, or in surprise endings — or simply in the astonishing way he has suddenly quoting other people's music. These quotes can ~~all~~ be anything from "My Darlin' Clementine" — as we just heard — all the way to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Brahms' First, & all the way back again to bugle-calls, rag-time tunes, & Suwanee River. It's again ~~a~~ that spirit of play — playing with music; and in the piece we're going to hear next — a perfectly serious little work called Washington's Birthday — you'll hear at least five such quotes, all of them cosy, home-town, old-fashioned ditties. And there's a reason for this. Ives was born and raised in Danbury, Connecticut, and although his business life eventually took him to Buffalo

City, he always returned to Connecticut, to the small-town ~~country~~ life he loved. ~~[illegible]~~ To his dying day he remained a country boy at heart; and the musical memories of his childhood – the local marching bands, the fiddling and fifing at barn-dances, the hymns, patriotic songs, sentimental tunes + folk-ditties – all these haunted his music as long as he wrote. And, no matter how pioneering his music gets – how daring, adventurous, complicated, "modernistic" – there are always musical reminders of the old days, the music he heard as a boy. This gives a sad sweetness to a lot of Ive's music – especially when it's mixed with the strange new ~~[illegible]~~ sounds he invented. This Washington's Birthday is exactly such a piece: mysterious and nostalgic; and yet, like all the others, full of fun. Let me read you a few lines from Ive's own introductory note in the score. He speaks first of the similarity between the ~~the quiet~~ bleak ~~of~~ New England winter and the Puritan character, suggesting that nature is reflecting the stern fibre of the early settlers. Then he says:

"But to the younger generation . . .
etc . . . . . February night."

There you have a lovely description of the piece. It starts bleakly enough with vagne wintry mutterings by the muted strings; ~~until suddenly a lonely flute sings out~~ ~~There is~~ but almost at once there is one of those peculiar quotes – a flute singing out "Swanee River", of all things.

ORK – (B), 2 bars.

Do you see why I say "peculiar" quote? It's not exactly Swanee River, yet it is, in some odd, drooping way, like something hazily remembered from long ago. This quiet winter picture eventually builds up to quite a noise – nothing realistic, like whistling winds or that sort of thing; rather an inner image of winter – gray, sombre, difficult, unyielding. But suddenly that barn-dance breaks out, in high spirits, and a Quadrille is launched:

ORK – (M) – 9 bars.

And in this section you'll hear all kinds of peculiar quotes: Does it have a name? this familiar hornpipe:

Fl – (N) + 8, with uplt., 3 bars

The famous Camptown Races:

Horn – (N) + 12, 6 bars.

All a bit peculiar, you notice. And then, of course, comes that barn-dance perennial staple, Turkey-in-the-Straw:

Fl – (Q) – 7½ bars.

Very peculiar, that one. Now comes the maddest fall: the old favorite reel, "The Campbells Are Coming", played by a horn and – now get this – a Jew's Harp. I don't know if you've ever seen a Jew's harp – it has nothing to do, by the way, with anything Jewish; the name is simply a corruption of Jaw's harp, since this tiny instrument is played between the teeth. Then the player twangs a little metal ~~tongue~~ extension with his finger, and out

comes — well, a twang. I'm sure you'll recognize the sound.

(Player twangs a bit)

Now only Charles Ives could have thought up this insane combination of Horn + Jew's Harp, playing The Campbells Are Coming, written deliberately out of tune, and out of time, while, mind you, the rest of the orchestra is going wild with its own barn-dance music. It's a riot.

ORK - (R) to (S), dbt.

Can we identify it?

Crazy, you say? Well, it gets even crazier, until it reaches one of those typical Ives blasts, and suddenly, — silence, + a sentimental old tune which I can't identify, behind which, in a whole other key, a lone fiddle is hauntingly recalling Turkey in the Straw; and finally, to the strains of Good-Night, Ladies, the whole dream disappears ~~vanishes~~ into the winter darkness. You see, it was ~~is~~ a dream; all Ives' pieces are dreams; dreams of childhood and a vanished world. I think you'll enjoy ~~Ives~~ Washington's Birthday, ~~by Charles Ives.~~

ORK.

~~Eck - 12~~
~~Ong - 4~~
~~Wash - 9~~
~~25'~~

8

~~Steeples - 3~~
~~Circus - 3~~
~~Halloween - 3~~
~~Lincoln - 5~~
~~Question - 5~~
~~America - 6 30~~

An extraordinary piece, Washington's Birthday; I would go so far as to say a great one. Sometimes I think it is Ives' masterpiece — so personal, so mysterious, unlike anything else ever written. We mustn't forget that he wrote it in 1913, when he was ~~under~~ not yet 40 years old; but it is still late Ives, because he stopped writing altogether after 1916 — except for some ~~tiny~~ songs and tiny things in the 20's. But he lived until 1954, almost to the age of 80. ~~So for all practical purposes~~ In other words, during the last 30 years or ~~more~~ so of his life, Ives wrote almost nothing; so we come to realize that all his important works are at least half-a century old. An amazing thought, when you hear this Washington's Birthday, which could have been written yesterday, or even tomorrow.

Why? Neglect? Ill-health?

OVER

Now, by way of contrast, we ~~a~~ are going to hear some Early Ives — a little piece called Circus Band March, which he wrote as a young man of 20, way back in 1894. This one is pure fun; Ives is not trying to tell us anything about the Puritan character or the mystery of nature. It's just what its title says: A Circus Band March. ~~He originally wrote it for chorus~~ This peppy-and peppery-little march ~~went through a number of transformations: it was first sketched out as in 1894, but later Ives decides to make it a choral piece, & wrote some very odd words to it~~. Exists in two versions: one for orchestra alone, & one with a chorus singing some rather

(If Lincoln is next, use this:)

Now that we've had Washington, we might as well have Lincoln too: after all, this is the season when we celebrate birth of Rem. And so now we're going to hear a song about Lincoln by Ives, etc.

odd words written by Ives himself. We've decided to do without the chorus, since you can't ~~[illegible]~~ understand the words a chorus is singing while a circus band is blaring away. But I thought ~~you'd like to~~ you might like to know what the words are anyway — because they also show ~~[illegible]~~ Ives' slightly mad spirit of fun. Here they are:

Copy in

|| All summer-long, etc.

|| ... but he sees me not.

~~(mention quotes of [illegible] & other song in Horn?)~~

And now here comes the Circus Band.

TORK

~~[illegible]~~

As you can hear, old Ives had lots of jokes up his sleeve; but one thing is for sure — it's no joke to play these pieces. They are incredibly difficult to perform, even for the mighty New York Philharmonic; and to play one Ives piece after another is quite a strain. So we're now going to give the orchestra a short breather, while we hear ~~and give~~ a song by ~~you be~~ Ives, ~~song~~ for voice and piano only. Some people think that Ives was at his greatest as a writer of songs — as I told you before, he wrote over a hundred of them; and the one we're going to hear is one of his most magnificent achievements. It is called Lincoln, The Great Commoner; and ~~the words are taken from a poem by Edwin Markham, the American poet who is most famous for his Man with the Hoe. This song of~~

it is no ordinary song — no simple melody with a accompaniment; it is like a monument, a tremendous and awe-inspiring structure. ~~[It is also very difficult to perform, both for the singer and the pianist. In fact, Ives thought this song was important enough to make another version of it for chorus and orchestra; but again, we decided against the choral version because you'd never hear the words.]~~

Poss out

When we listen to this song about Lincoln, our understanding of Ives begins to grow. We have already known him, through the Gong piece at the beginning, as a man who loves his hometown, Main Street in Danbury, Conn. In Washington's Birthday, we see Ives as one who loves New England — the country life, the power of nature. And now we shall see him as a patriot — a man who adored his country. This streak of patriotism runs all through his music, just as it runs through the poetry of Walt Whitman. In fact, Ives and Whitman are very much alike — the same enormous energy, vitality, humor, and ~~universal love~~ boyish exuberance can be found in both. But Ives went much further with his music than Whitman did with words; Ives really created a new musical language for himself, as we are now going to hear in this song. We will also hear some more of those "peculiar" quotes that were so dear to his heart, only

This time the quotes are all from patriotic songs — ~~And this time they are~~ naturally. The Star-Spangled Banner, Columbia the Gem of the Ocean, Glory, Glory Hallelujah, America, and so on. ~~Now just to prepare you a little for this onslaught~~ Let's see if you can recognize a couple of them, dressed up as they are in Ives' strange new language. Which one is this? —

Pno — (A)

(And. part)

And how about this one?

Pno — (B)

Now you may not think it very patriotic to treat The Star-Spangled Banner that way; but from Ives' point of view it was intensely patriotic. He was not by any means making fun of his national anthem; on the contrary, he was making it richer and more colorful by adding his own strong musical feelings to it. In fact, the very ending of the song is that same opening phrase from the national anthem, not so dissonant this time, but ~~switching keys in mid-phrase.~~ ~~Sliding from one key to another.~~

PLAY.

But he's not even content to stick with that last chord: it's too ordinary for him. (PLAY) So he slyly sneaks in a soft dissonant chord (PLAY) underneath the big one ~~(PLAY)~~ — so that when the big chord breaks off, this soft dissonant one is still sounding. And that's

Now the song ends — on a note of mystery again. What an amazing mind that Ives had!

Now, to sing this song for us we are fortunate to have Mr Simon Estes, that splendid bass-baritone who knocked them dead ~~last year~~ in Moscow last year, at the Chaikovsky competition. And just before Mr Estes sings it, I'd like to tell you the words of the song, so that you'll already know them, and can concentrate as hard as possible on the music itself. These words are by the American poet Edwin Markham.

"... And so he came, etc.
... wrenching rafters from their ancient hold"

— and here Ives goes really mad, and has the pianist pound out chords with his fists (show) —
— to continue then:

"... and when the step of earthquake...
... upon the hills!"

Now here is Mr. Estes, to sing Lincoln The Great Commoner.

Now that was an earful; I hope it wasn't too much for you. But you must never forget that pioneering genius that was Charles Ives; his spirit of adventure, and of play, took him way beyond the borders of us ordinary mortals. And in the next work the orchestra will play — (I am sure they're quite rested now) — Ives takes us even farther along in his mysterious adventures. The piece we're going to hear is without doubt his most famous work — The Unanswered Question. I don't know if it's famous enough for you to have heard it, but it's one Ives work that is played and known all over the world.

~~Listen~~ This short piece takes us a long way from Danbury, Conn. — beyond New England, beyond America, out to the universe itself. Ives is now dealing with the greatest mysteries of life, asking the age-old question: ~~of Existence: why are we here~~ Why do we exist? Ives assigns this question ~~is intoned by the~~ to a solo trumpet, which intones it six separate times (TPT.) and each time there comes an answer, or an attempt at an answer, from a group of woodwinds. The first answer is very indefinite and slow; the second is faster, the third even faster, and the sixth so fast it comes out like wild gibberish. ~~And all this~~ These woodwinds, according to Ives, represent human answers, growing increasingly impatient and desperate, until they lose their meaning entirely. And all this time, right from the beginning, the strings have been playing

their own music, ~~of~~ infinitely soft and slow and sustained, never changing, never growing louder or faster, women being affected by that strange question-and-answer dialogue of the trumpet and the woodwinds. It is as though the strings were the great galaxy of stars, which keeps slowly, imperceptibly circling about over our heads, as we ask our questions and try to give answers; and however hard we try, whatever answers we give, the stars keep circling, unchanging + unconcerned. ~~circling, circling~~. Then finally the trumpet asks his question for the seventh time, and this time there is no answer at all; only the silent slow-motion of the universe.

What an idea for a piece of music!

And you may well ask: But what has happened to that spirit of play, that adventure you talked about? Oh, but what a spirit of play there is in this piece! Think of how adventurous a mind must be to think up this concept of two musics at once, ~~quite~~ totally independent of each other in time or rhythm or key or anything. This is a concept that is now popular among some of the new young composers; but the Unanswered Question was written in 1908, + almost 60 years ago. ~~And as for fun, it's all, there are all kinds of fun in this world, and some fun can be quite serious; like only think of your hobbies, serious ones like stamp-collecting or building model planes; aren't those fun? Ives played with music~~

~~as the Greek gods played with human destinies, as Columbus and Admiral Byrd played with their destinies, as all great inventors have played with steam or electricity or atomic fission. The Unanswered Question is pure adventure; it is fun on the highest possible level.~~

Ives was our first great American composer. All alone in his barn, ~~he~~ created his own private musical revolution, whose rumblings are ~~is~~ beginning to be understood. ~~He was our first great American composer~~.

These rumblings, which we will now hear, are very soft indeed; in fact, we are breaking a hallowed tradition of the concert-hall by ending our program with a soft, slow piece. But if Ives was a pioneer, so can we; it's all in the spirit of adventure.

Leonard Bernstein
15 Jan '67