American Music in the Twentieth Century

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Kyle Gann

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for Nancy

"I don't think myself confin'd to any Rules for composition, laid down by any that went before me . . . "

—William Billings, 1770

"Can't we get all the art we need from France?"

—Calvin Coolidge, 1927

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Prelude: What Is American Music?

Before 1492, the land that now comprises the United States was occupied only by the people Columbus misidentified as "Indians." Thus, it could be said that the only indigenously American music is the vocal chanting (usually with drums or rattles) of the American Indians. Today that music is taught, however, as part of the field of ethnomusicology, rather than as a shared tradition. Everyone else who lives in the United States is descended from families who came from somewhere else: mostly Europe, Africa, Asia, or Latin America. When we use that speciously simple term "American music," then, whose music are we talking about?

Let us take as our premise that there is such a thing as "American music" and that it results partly from the clash of European, African, Asian, and Latin American influences. Partly, not completely—for it also results from unfettered Yankee inventiveness and from the freedom Americans have had to create their own music without the restrictions (or benefits) of an assumed, shared culture. Every American composition is a dialogue between inheritance and freedom. Unlike the histories of, say, European classical or East Indian classical musics, which deal with individual contributions to a strong, continuing tradition, American music is a history of originality and innovation. It is the paradox of American music, in fact, that it is a tradition of originality.

At this late and sophisticated date, such a concern with what is specifically American in music would seem to have been discredited. The limitations of nationalism as an aesthetic (with its underlying connections to Romanticism) have been apparent for decades. As an antidote, the slogan "American music is whatever is written by American composers" has become widely accepted, valued for its refusal to impose essentialist criteria that would separate "real" American composers from less authentic ones. Laudable as such a motivation is, however, the slogan's seemingly benign transparency has left American music in a vulnerable position.

Today, as musical society gropes about for a situation of fairer representation in the arts under the banner of multiculturalism, the public

perception is that Asian, African, European, and Latin American cultures each have their own musical identity, but that aside from jazz and rock, there is no such thing as an American concert music tradition. America is so distrustful of its own musical creativity that it continues to project musical achievement on the rest of the world, preserving its own cultural inferiority complex. So intense is the focus on the dichotomy between Eurocentric tradition on one hand and ethnic musics—by which the Third World is meant—on the other, that "American classical music" is perceived as just a special case of the European tradition.

And yet, every other culture has its formalized, listening-centered, ritual musical tradition as well as its dance music, its theater music, its entertainment music. We have no qualms about speaking of Indian classical music, or Japanese classical music; but applied to our own music, "classical" makes us squeamish, as though it automatically suggests elitism and aristocracy rather than a specific social function and performance situation. Because of this specious, unexamined distinction, American composers, who stood in the shadow of their European counterparts for decades, have recently been expected to step back in favor of musicians from Asia and Africa.

For the sake of our national musical self-esteem, it is urgent to show that America is not an empty vessel into which the musics of other societies may be poured, but a culture with its own genius, innovations, and traditions, now long since capable of influencing other cultures as they have influenced us. (American minimalism, electronic techniques, and the aesthetics of John Cage, for example, have had tremendous impact on Scandinavian, Eastern European, Italian, Japanese, and even Indonesian composers.) The problem is that Americanness in music has been searched for in the qualities of the music itself, music that is far too diverse to generalize about.

More fruitful would be to look for the nature of American music in the social conditions all American composers share, since such conditions determine the expectations and assumptions that go into the creative act. American composers are, of course, free to write anything they wish, and the American public is free to ignore it. Those facts have aesthetic consequences. Given the dearth of professional support for serious music in America, it is possible that a composer who initiates his own radical, personal tradition with himself as sole representative (such as Harry Partch) might conceivably have as much success getting performed and understood as the most academic adherent to European (or other) tradition. An American's acquiescence to tradition is a matter of personal choice, not social compulsion, and therefore takes on a different character. Perhaps America is the only place where traditionalism itself can constitute an act of defiance.

Stylistically, the approach of this book will be reductive, finding Americanness by taking the entirety of what American composers have

done and subtracting from it the identifiably European, Asian, African, and Latin American elements. It is impossible to deny American classical music's roots in Europe, just as, later in the century, it becomes impossible to deny African and then Asian roots as well; but there is little point in discussing here what books on European, African, and Asian music discuss at greater depth. Our story will begin with two composers who ignored both the mandates of European tradition and the progression of European fads to invent a new music virtually from scratch: Charles Ives and Henry Cowell. From this fount of native experimentalism an American tradition flowed, a tradition not of procedures and rules but of resources, attitudes, and pragmatic inventiveness.

The book will not explore in any depth the history of rock, jazz, or popular forms, except insofar as they helped shape this tradition. The invention of jazz and rock were supreme examples of American originality, but once established, each genre created its own tradition, each of which deserves its own book.

Consequently, the title becomes an insoluble dilemma. To call the book "American *Art*-Music in the Twentieth Century" would insultingly imply that jazz and rock are not art. "American Classical Music" would create a false expectation that the book covers extensions of European tradition, while that now old-fashioned term "Serious Music" would offend almost everyone. "Concert Music," a term recently favored in some circles, negates the fact that much of this music has spread out into non-concert (loft, outdoor, or ambient) situations, not to mention the obvious complication that there are also jazz concerts and rock concerts. In symphony orchestra circles the terms "experimental music" and even "American eccentrics" have been used to marginalize indigenously American art-music movements. Even if one wanted to disparage the hundreds of composers inspired by John Cage by calling their pieces mere "experiments," to apply such terms to Americans as successful within the establishment as Copland, Babbitt, and Glass would be ludicrous.

This terminological impasse is so symptomatic of cultural conditions in the 1990s that there is little point in decrying it, and less in applying some makeshift solution. Anyone disappointed by the inexact relation of the book's title to its subject matter will simply have to wait for a period of greater musico-terminological clarity than we enjoy at present.

The book is organized roughly by decades, more explicitly by the milieu which seemed to characterize each decade. After 1950, however, one chapter per decade is no longer enough, as the streams of music have proliferated wildly; artrock, postminimalism, and the New Romanticism all developed in parallel during the late 1970s and 1980s, shaped by different sets of forces. Within each decade or milieu I have singled out three to eight composers who seemed to best define that era, even if much of their work was done in decades previous to or following

the one I have them representing; most composers' careers span thirty to sixty years, but they commonly become associated with the moment at which they first caught the public ear.

Almost without planning it my criterion has been to emphasize not necessarily the best composers, nor my favorites, nor even the ones best known to the public; but the figures who seemed, in my own view, to exert most influence on the history of American composing (even if in a not-very-public manner, like James Tenney or Conlon Nancarrow), who seemed most responsible for shaping the nature of American music. At the end of each chapter I discuss more briefly as many artists as possible associated with the ideas of the chapter—many of them not minor by any criterion, but arguably less central in defining the chapter's milieu.

It is a cliché that "Jazz is the only indigenous American music," and while the cliché gives due tribute to jazz's importance and authenticity, it conceals a back-handed slap at composers of American classical music, an assumption that all formalized music stems from European tradition. If this book does not help dispel that cliché, it will have failed in its central intention. Only by claiming its creative heritage and relinquishing its macho pose as the world's only "cultureless culture" can America become, as John Cage hoped, "just another part of the world, no more, no less."

CHAPTER 1

Forefathers

American Music in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

More than any other art except architecture, music requires a social support system. An artist can finish a painting alone in her studio, but a musical composition usually requires the assembly and rehearsal of performers for its completion, which in turn generally implies the presence of an audience for whom the effort is expended. In African and American Indian societies, the support system for music involves virtually everyone in a village or tribe, each of whom performs music as an essential part of social and sacred ritual. In Europe, where social functions are more specialized, a musician requires a complex network of presenting organizations, teaching institutions, critical venues, and sufficiently sophisticated audiences in order to live a fulfilling musical life.

After 1492, Europeans fleeing religious and political persecution had a strong incentive to emigrate to America. Expert musicians had a strong incentive to stay in Europe, where their music could be performed well and appreciated. The celebrated European composers who toured America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Busoni, Tchaikovsky, and Scriabin, for example) found such tours, though sometimes lucrative, a burden because of the primitiveness of the musical organizations and the naïveté of the audiences. Thus was America's musical inferiority complex born.

From the beginning the American composer labored under an assumption that crippled his or her creativity: any innovation, any departure from European precedent, would be interpreted as a technical deficiency. In some music circles this is still true today. Europeans like Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner were free to ignore the past and create their own rules, but American symphonists such as Bristow, Chadwick, and Beach dared not transgress beyond precedents set by even the more con-

servative Europeans: Mendelssohn, Brahms, Dvořák. As Henry Cowell wrote, "Transplanted to the United States, the rules of harmony and composition took on a doctrinaire authority that was the more dogmatic for being second hand."[1]

The American painter saw in front of him a wilderness that did not look like the paintings of Europe (assuming he even saw the latter), and Nature commanded him, in painting what he saw, to innovate. But the American composer, lacking any such objective correlative, usually felt obliged to ignore the wilderness and write in the urban, psychological style of the European music she could study in the score or hear at concerts. The result, as Wilfrid Mellers put it, was

> a dream-evocation of the Old World as it never was or could have been. . . . Most nineteenth-century American music . . . manifested a passive veneration for the Teutonic, which represented Art; and was usually well written, cheerful, and agreeable: a pretence that the wilderness did not exist, that the heart was not a "lonely hunter."[2]

Mellers's characterization is especially true of the composers who studied in Europe, less so of those who did not. John Knowles Paine (1839–1906) studied in Berlin 1958–1961 with Karl-August Haupt, met Clara Schumann, absorbed German aesthetics, and came home to express the latter in large-scale concert works. George Whitefield Chadwick (1854–1931) studied at Leipzig Conservatory with Reinecke and Jadassohn and enjoyed early success with his string quartets and symphonies. Horatio Parker (1863–1919) studied in 1882–1885 in Munich with Josef Rheinberger and later became known for his grand oratorio *Hora novissima* (1893). Along with John Sullivan Dwight, the "Dean of American music critics"—a Transcendentalist who participated with Bronson Alcott in the ill-fated Brook Farm commune experiment—Paine championed what he called the "modern Romantic movement," meaning Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, and Mendelssohn, as well as Bach (whose works were being rediscovered in Germany during Paine's years there), Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven. The aesthetics of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner were considered suspect for moral and sexual reasons as well as musical ones; from the very beginning America has distrusted the bohemian lifestyle of the avant-garde artist.

Paine, Chadwick, and Parker were the leading American musical pedagogues of their day. In the 1870s, Paine convinced Harvard to appoint him America's first university music professor, and he taught many of the composers—John Alden Carpenter, Frederick Converse, Arthur Foote, Edward Burlingame Hill, Daniel Gregory Mason—who in turn taught America's first generation of well-known professional composers. From 1882 until his death Chadwick taught at Boston's New England Conservatory, counting among his students Horatio Parker, Converse, Hill, Mason, and Arthur Farwell. Parker taught at Yale from

1894 on, where his students included Quincy Porter, Roger Sessions, and, most notably, Charles Ives. The power of this triumvirate, then, in imposing an exaggerated awe of European musical standards and practices, was incalculable. One could say that American music has not yet succeeded in completely escaping its grip.

The case of Edward MacDowell (1860–1908) demonstrates how much a European, and specifically German, reputation meant at the time. MacDowell studied at the Paris Conservatory (where Debussy was a classmate) and in Frankfurt with the composer Joachim Raff. As a pianist, he played for Liszt not only Liszt's music, but his own First Piano Concerto, and Liszt had enough faith in him to program his music. MacDowell taught at the Darmstadt Conservatory but was forced to return to America in 1888 by financial difficulties. Upon his return he was celebrated as the one composer to have succeeded in expressing American traits (or perhaps more accurately Celtic ones, through his Scottish descent) through a professional German polish. In 1896 Columbia University appointed him its first professor of music, but syphilis and a cab accident destroyed his mind, and he died in a state of acute mental disability.

Largely because of his continental polish, MacDowell was considered for decades America's greatest composer, and often compared to Edvard Grieg, another nationalist composer (from Norway) who trained in Germany. There is, admittedly, a simple melodicism to MacDowell's music, Lisztian rather than Brahmsian, that makes it more memorable than that of Paine or Chadwick. Eventually, however, the sentimentality and structural weakness of his music became apparent, and his reputation has dropped tremendously, though amateur pianists still play his *Woodland Sketches*. More important to music history, however, is the artist colony MacDowell's wife founded in his name on their eighty-acre estate in the hills of New Hampshire.

On the other hand were composers who did not study in Europe and who made their livings as practicing musicians rather than in the university. The son of a conductor, George Frederick Bristow (1825–1898) played in the violin section of the New York Philharmonic for thirty-six years, though he resigned for several months in 1854 to protest the orchestra's treatment of American composers. If there is, among nineteenth-century American symphonies, a counterexample to Mellers's description above, it may be Bristow's *Arcadian Symphony* (1872), subtitled "The Pioneer," with its first movement growing from a lonely violin solo. Amy Cheney Beach (1867–1944, generally known during her lifetime by her married name, Mrs. H. H. A. Beach), was a child prodigy in Boston who did not visit Europe until 1910, following the death of her husband; the trip was not to study, but to promote her music. Though she curtailed her performing career at her husband's request, her Piano Concerto, her *Gaelic Symphony*, and some of her songs and piano pieces have been revived in recent years.

Studying with Paine at Harvard, Arthur Foote (1853–1937) received the first Master's Degree in music in America, and though he visited Europe as a student, he did not study there formally. He worked as a private piano teacher, teaching piano at New England Conservatory the last sixteen years of his life, and wrote some of the finest chamber music of the American nineteenth century. Charles Martin Loeffler (1861–1935) was born in Alsace on the French and German border and studied in Berlin, but he moved to America in 1881 and eventually became the second concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. His music, highly polished and cosmopolitan, leans heavily toward French impressionism in such programmatic tone poems as *La mort de Tintagiles.*

These composers left a neglected body of music that can occasionally be delightful, especially in the smaller forms. Their symphonies, operas, and chamber works often fail, not from misguided innovation but from trying to duplicate too closely the external formal design of their European models, without the sense of inner compulsion from which those models arose in the first place. For instance, the themes of the movements of Chadwick's Second Symphony are all related by melodic contour, after the cyclic thematic form of late French Romanticism, but Chadwick makes the relationships obvious to the point of monotony. Bristow's symphonies are marred by excessive formal repetition. Parker's *Hora Novissima,* highly esteemed in his lifetime because of its grandiose spiritual intentions, today sounds tediously stuffy.

There were, however, other pre-twentieth-century American composers who paid little attention to European models. When their works failed, they failed from genuine ignorance of harmonic and formal solutions. When they succeeded, they achieved an authenticity that holds up, a century later, better than the Europe imitations of the New England symphonists. It is perhaps ironic but understandable that the early American composers who wrote the most sincere and individual music were those who did not feel a debt to Europe and who never felt consigned to force their intuitions into expressive forms foreign to them. In particular, a remarkable trio of American originals felt that their distance from Europe gave them license to sculpt their own forms: William Billings, Anthony Philip Heinrich, and Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

Billings (1746–1800), a Boston tanner by trade, with little musical education, published six books of hymns and secular choral pieces. He has been described as "a singular man, of moderate size, short of one leg, with one eye, without any address [i.e., social adroitness], and with an uncommon negligence of person. Still he spake and sung and thought as a man above the common abilities."[3] Among his innovations were what he called "fuging tunes," a minor form inherited from English music that he claimed was "more than twenty times as powerful as the old slow tunes." In the introduction to Billings's first tunebook, *The New-England Psalm-Singer* (1770, with a frontispiece engraved by no less than Paul

Revere), he wrote the archetypal declaration of American music's independence from Europe:

> . . . all the hard, dry, studied rules that ever was prescribed, will not enable any person to form an air. . . . I don't think myself confin'd to any Rules for composition, laid down by any that went before me, neither should I think (were I to pretend to lay down Rules) that any who came after me were any ways obligated to adhere to them . . . I think it is best for every Composer to be his own Carver.[4]

The didactic prefaces to his hymn books show that Billings was aware of the prohibition against parallel fifth intervals in European counterpoint, but his music shows that he (like Beethoven after him) felt free to use them anyway. To thumb his nose at his critics and at European authority, Billings wrote one choral song, "Jargon," harmonized entirely in harsh (though diatonic) dissonances.

For all their occasional naïveté and awkward meter changes, Billings's hymns have a wonderful, vibrant energy. They ultimately became part of rural America's "Sacred Harp" tradition of shaped-note singing, a rough-hewn style of psalmody using notes of different shapes for pedagogical purposes that survives in rural areas to the present day. (The second most famous hymn writer in this genre was Supply Belcher, 1751–1836, dubbed "The Handel of Maine.") As late as the 1960s, Billings's stirring revolutionary war song "Chester" was still taught to American school children:

> Let tyrants shake their iron rods
> And slavery clank its galling chains
> We fear them not, we trust in God.
> New England's God forever reigns.

Born in Bohemia, Anthony Philip Heinrich (1781–1861) came to America in 1810 and, self-taught, began to compose in 1818, nevertheless becoming one of America's most prominent musicians in the period preceding the Civil War. In 1817 he led the first known New World performance of any Beethoven symphony—the First—and in 1842 he was one of the founders of the New York Philharmonic Society. Starting with a collection of vocal and instrumental works called *The Dawning of Music in Kentucky,* he wrote pieces with titles and programs, such as the *Barbecue Divertimento* and his grand symphony *The Ornithological Combat of Kings,* that have occasioned much annotator's humor in this century. He was the first to use American Indian themes in large works, and wrote orchestral music of such complexity that the American orchestras of his day had great difficulty performing it. Certainly Heinrich pushed the Haydnesque, eighteenth-century language he inherited to extremes that can seem comic in performance today, but he also strung together quotations and ideas in a stream-of-consciousness way that anticipated

twentieth-century trends. Though frequently awkward, his music is rarely dull.

Born in New Orleans, Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829–1869) was exposed early to African, Creole, and West Indian influences, and later made pioneering use of them in his music. A phenomenal pianist, he concertized in France, Switzerland, Spain, and Latin America. He also studied in Paris, but with Berlioz, the Frenchman whose life (he was an opium addict) and musical style the other Americans considered scandalous. Somewhat following Berlioz's example, Gottschalk presented "monster concerts" of ten pianos or 900 musicians and played more than a thousand concerts between 1862 and 1865 alone. Such activities were antithetical to the sober sensibilities of the New England symphonists, and John Sullivan Dwight criticized Gottschalk harshly. At one concert, however, Gottschalk played a work of his own and attributed it to Beethoven in the program; Dwight, as expected, praised the "Beethoven" composition and excoriated Gottschalk's music for its "amateurish inanities," whereupon Gottschalk wrote him to apologize for the unfortunate printing error.

Gottschalk's piano pieces, modeled after Chopin and with sentimentally programmatic titles such as *The Dying Poet, The Last Hope,* and *Souvenir de Porto Rico,* can be superficial, but they also represent a bold and authentic introduction of African and Cuban idioms to the piano repertoire, decades before ragtime would continue the effort. Today, the music of distinguished symphonists such as Paine and Chadwick is exhumed only by specialists, while the less polished music of Billings and Gottschalk has retained considerable popularity, for its own beauty as well as for being a symbol of an inimitably American musical sensibility. The contrast illustrates the enormous conflict in American music between those who believe that great art can only come from following the European tradition and those who feel that America's new situation required starting from a clean slate with an attentiveness to the local environment.

One celebrated incident epitomizes another conflict that the American composer has faced from the beginning. Between 1892 and 1895, the Czech composer Antonín Dvořák served as director of New York's National Conservatory of Music. In 1893, just as he was finishing his own "New World" Symphony supposedly based on Negro themes, Dvořák made a statement to the press, quoted in the *New York Herald:* "I am now satisfied . . . that the future music of this country must be founded upon what are called negro melodies. . . . There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot be supplied with themes from this source."[5] The following week, the *Boston Herald* printed replies by Paine, Chadwick, and Beach. Paine's internationalist response was one that would be echoed throughout the twentieth century:

> Dr. Dvorak . . . greatly overestimates the influence that national melodies and folk-songs have exercised on the higher forms of musical art. In the case of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and other

> German masters, the old folk-songs have been used to a limited extent as motives; but movements founded on such themes are exceptional in comparison with the immense amount of entirely original thematic material that constitutes the bulk of their music. . . .
>
> The time is past when composers are to be classed according to geographical limits. It is not a question of nationality, but individuality, and individuality of style is not the result of imitation—whether of folk songs, negro melodies, the tunes of the heathen Chinese or Digger Indians, but of personal character and inborn originality. During the present century art has overstepped all national limits.[6]

Beach responded with her own opposed nationalist claim:

> Without the slightest desire to question the beauty of the negro melodies . . . or to disparage them on account of their source, I cannot help feeling justified in the belief that they are not fully typical of our country. The African population of the United States is far too small for its songs to be considered "American." It represents only one factor in the composition of our nation. . . . We of the north should be far more likely to be influenced by the old English, Scotch, or Irish songs, inherited with our literature from our ancestors.[7]

Here, within one newspaper article, were the two viewpoints between which American music would oscillate for at least a century afterward: Paine, the defender of high art and the extension of European culture, and Beach, the defender of the American's right to choose her own idiom.

Since America is not an ancient country, the relationship of its art music to its vernacular music has never been allowed to evolve gradually or naturally, but always with problematic self-consciousness. In the 1930s, composers would try to create an American music from, if not quotation of actual folk melodies, at least imitation of American inflections. In the 1950s, composers would eschew nationalist characteristics to join Europeans in an international style. And in the 1980s, one of the most bitterly contested philosophic differences among American composers would be the question whether music should flow from a vernacular or whether it should be constructed from pure sonic materials without extramusical referents. The issues of American music were all in place by the mid-nineteenth century and are intrinsic to America's national character and unique social situation. Time has sharpened but not changed them.

Charles Ives

Charles Ives (1874–1954), whom many still consider America's greatest composer, was the first American to step deliberately outside European musical conventions in major works. He is a paradigm of the composer's

Charles Ives. *Photo by Frank Gerratana,* Bridgeport Herald. *Courtesy New York Public Library.*

problematic place in American society: writing music on evenings and weekends, he worked as head of the Ives & Myrick Insurance Agency, a subsidiary of Mutual of New York. Yet Ives's music, most of it written in near-total isolation, contains a list of innovations that anticipates the majority of 20th-century musical trends: unprecedented dissonance, densely heterogeneous textures, instrumental groups set apart from each other in space, unusual means of playing the piano keyboard, classical appropriation of ragtime, quarter-tones, simultaneous tunes played in different tempos, and widespread quotation of folk music, popular music, and hymns.

Ives was born October 20, 1874, in Danbury, Connecticut. His father, George Ives, was the first musician in a prominent family of successful businessmen, and no other composer's father, not even Leopold Mozart, plays so large a role in his son's biography. Charles Ives, who began composing by age 12, attributed his experimental tendencies to his father's open-minded training, and claimed that his father rigged up contrivances with violin strings to experiment with tunings, had the family sing both in two keys at once and in quarter tones, and tried to match the sonorities of local church bells with dissonances on the piano. Ives remembered his father dividing his band into sections and having them play simultaneously from different locations, and again (perhaps unintentionally) having two bands pass each other playing different pieces at once. (Ives's memories, however, are not all confirmable by contemporary press accounts, and he has been charged with glorifying his father's contribution to his spectacular originality.)

Following an Ives family tradition, Ives attended Yale, where he studied with Horatio Parker, who had trained in Munich under Joseph Rheinberger. Parker could not believe that Ives's dissonances and rhythmic experiments were seriously meant, and "asked me," Ives later wrote, "not to bring any more things like these into the classroom."[8] During one of Parker's classes, Parker's teacher Chadwick walked in as Parker was criticizing one of Ives's songs, "Summerfields." According to Ives's *Memos,* Parker had claimed the song had "too many keys in the middle," but Chadwick looked at the song and pronounced, "In it's [its] way almost as good as Brahms! [To Parker:] That's as good a song as you could write."[9] Parker's favored student was David Stanley Smith (1877–1949), who succeeded him at Yale as Dean from 1920 to 1946. Despite Parker's higher regard for it, Smith's music has fallen into oblivion. Parker's influence on Ives is difficult to assess, but there is, in Parker's popular tone poem *A Northern Ballad,* a transition that vividly anticipates one in Ives's *Thanksgiving*.

Unfortunately, George Ives, the only musician prepared to understand his son's experimentalism, died of a stroke in November of Charles's freshman year of college. It would be twenty-three years before Ives would meet another musician sympathetic to his music, twenty-three years in which he would write almost his complete works. Ives's music takes on deeper meaning in relation to his isolation from other professional musicians and to his musical inheritance from his father; it has even been suggested that Ives composed the music his father failed to write.[10] After college, he made only one attempt to go public with his music. On April 18, 1902, he conducted (from the organ) a performance of his cantata *The Celestial Country,* a work patterned after Parker's highly esteemed *Hora Novissima,* and one far more conservative than other pieces Ives had already written. The piece was respectfully reviewed in both the *New York Times* and the *Musical Courier,* yet Ives was apparently

disappointed (if not actually afraid of success), quit his organ job, and had no further professional performances of his music until 1921.

Ives suffered the first of a series of heart attacks in 1918, which, along with diabetes, eventually put an end to both his composing and his insurance work. (He retired from business a few weeks after the stock market crash of 1929, which had little effect on him.) Almost all of his music was written by 1921, though he was to live for another thirty-three years. By this time, however, he had become relatively wealthy in the insurance business and could afford to replace his role as composer (however unknown) with that of patron (usually anonymous). In 1920 he had 750 copies of his *Concord Sonata* privately printed and sent to musical figures he thought might be interested. He followed this in 1921 by printing the *Essays Before a Sonata,* literary writings meant to accompany the Sonata as a kind of aesthetic explanation, and in 1922 he published a dazzlingly heterogeneous song collection, *114 Songs.*

The songs and sonata met with general incomprehension, even to the extent of doubts whether Ives could possibly be serious. A few copies, however, fell into sympathetic hands, and in 1927 Ives was contacted by a composer who would do more than anyone else to advance his music: Henry Cowell. Cowell, an indefatigable pianist and music promoter (of whom more in chapter 2), had just begun publishing *New Music,* an important journal in which scores of dozens of progressive American musical works were first published. Cowell made possible the first performances and publications of many of Ives's scores, while, in turn, Ives became the financial mainstay of *New Music.* With Cowell's contacts, Ives's money, and the astounding talent of the Russian-American conductor Nicolas Slonimsky, Ives's *Three Places in New England* was first heard in New York at Town Hall in January of 1931. The concert was to be repeated in coming months in Boston, Havana, and Paris, precipitating Europe's first notice of indigenously American orchestral music.

An even bigger spur to Ives's popularity came with John Kirkpatrick's intrepid New York premiere of the Piano Sonata No. 2, "Concord, Mass. 1840–1860," in 1939. Lawrence Gilman of the *New York Herald Tribune* reviewed the work as "the greatest music composed by an American, and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication." The review sparked public interest in Ives, an interest which (except during the years of World War II) crescendoed into an almost saintlike reputation in the 1960s. In 1947 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his hymn-filled Third Symphony, completed some thirty-six years earlier.

Ives died in 1954. Today his birthplace is marked by a plaque on the side of a Danbury bank on Main Street at Chapel Place, which reads, "On this site was born Charles Edward Ives, one of America's first great composers. Solitary radical in music, pioneer in polytonal harmonies and rhythm, his roots lay deep in his Danbury boyhood." The house he

was born in—one of America's rare musical shrines—has been moved from its original site and can be visited on Mountainville Avenue. The composer himself is buried in front of his father in Wooster Cemetery.

Ives's Works and Writings

Ives's important works include four symphonies (plus a visionary, unfinished "Universe" Symphony), two piano sonatas, four violin sonatas, two string quartets, numerous experimental works for mixed ensembles (including *The Unanswered Question*), two orchestral "sets" (one the famous *Three Places in New England*), and more than 160 songs constituting the most important art song repertoire by an American composer.

Ives wrote his Symphony No. 1 (1896–1898), more or less along the Germanic lines of his teacher Horatio Parker, while still in college, yet already it surpassed any earlier American symphony in polish and convincing form. His Symphony No. 2 (1897–1902) is a favorite example of Ives's characteristic quotation technique; the five-movement form is plausibly European, but the themes are loose take-offs on American folksongs such as "Turkey in the Straw," "America the Beautiful," "Camptown Races," "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," and even a tune from Brahms's Third Symphony. Ives's Third Symphony, subtitled "The Camp Meeting," is a relatively mild, tranquilly melodic piece, laced with revival-meeting hymns and with a *largo* finale loosely based on the hymn "Just As I Am." The most ambitious work Ives completed is his Fourth Symphony. It requires chorus (singing "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night" in the first movement), two conductors (for the second movement's two competing ensembles), two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart, and a large percussion battery, symbolizing in the last movement the heavens, or the landscape, against which the melodic action takes place. Characteristically, Ives buried gems of his musical philosophy in a "Conductor's Note" to the score, including the thought:

> How can there be any bad music? All music is from heaven. If there is anything bad in it, I put it there—by my implications and limitations. Nature builds the mountains and meadows and man puts in the fences and labels.[11]

Ives was reportedly a phenomenal improvising pianist, and his piano sonatas occupy a central place in his output. His First Piano Sonata (1902–1909) is remarkable for its static textures of tense cluster chords (adjacent piano keys played with fists or palms) in the fourth movement, its rousing jazz rendition of the hymn "Bringing In the Sheaves" in the third, and its early use of ragtime in three of its five movements. Ragtime, with its jerky syncopations over a back-and-forth bass pattern, had only started gaining public attention at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, where crowds heard rag pianists like

Scott Joplin, Jesse Pickett, Johnny Seamore, and Ben Harney for the first time. The first pieces specifically called "ragtime" were published in 1896. By the time he graduated from Yale, Ives was sufficiently familiar with this new music to "spell" (take over for) the pianist at Poli's, a local hangout. He used ragtime in the First Sonata at least ten years before Stravinsky, Milhaud, and other art-music composers began to look to it as a serious source. (Debussy, however, based a piece on ragtime's immediate predecessor, the cakewalk, in 1908.)

Ives became especially celebrated, though, for the Second Piano Sonata (1904–1915) when it was recorded by John Kirkpatrick in 1948 and spent several months on the bestseller list. Like much of Ives's music, the Sonata is frankly programmatic, and its subtitle is "Concord, Mass., 1840–1860." The four movements are based on literary figures in the Transcendentalist movement who lived in Concord, Massachusetts, between 1840 and 1860: the essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author Nathaniel Hawthorne, the itinerant philosopher Bronson Alcott and his novelist daughter Louisa May Alcott, and the influential hermit-naturalist Henry David Thoreau. In the 1920s the work became notorious not only for its difficulty and its rhapsodic looseness of form, but for the passages in "Emerson" that required the pianist to play large clusters of notes with a stick of wood.

As if to forestall the inevitable misunderstandings of so unconventional a work, Ives wrote a series of six essays to accompany the "Concord" and published them separately (finding it infeasible to publish the music and words together) as *Essays before a Sonata.* Full of paraphrased philosophic quotations and a salesman's folksy metaphors from everyday life, the book examines the nature of program music and art's complex relation to human character. Ives excuses the helter-skelter complexity of his "Emerson" movement by explaining its subject: "Emerson wrote by sentences or phrases rather than by logical sequence. . . . As thoughts surge to his mind, he fills the heavens with them, crowds them in, if necessary, but seldom arranges them along the ground first. . . . Vagueness is at times an indication of nearness to a perfect truth."[12]

In the epilogue Ives drew a distinction between "substance" and "manner." Substance he defined as "the body of a conviction which has its birth in the spiritual consciousness, whose youth is nourished in the moral consciousness, and whose maturity as a result of all this growth is then represented in a mental image,"[13] i.e., a work of art. "Manner" is the means through which substance is "translated into expression," and Ives found art superficial to the extent to which its manner outweighed its substance. For example, Emerson, for Ives, was almost wholly substance, Edgar Allan Poe almost wholly manner. And beauty, at least in the conventional sense, is not necessarily related to substance: "beauty in music is too often confused with something that lets the ears lie back in an easy chair."[14]

The speculations, in *Essays before a Sonata,* on how music communicates spiritual and moral intuitions point back to a deeper and peculiarly American unease. Ives, who lived the life of an upstanding, successful businessman, defended not only his extraordinary music but his lifestyle as a nonartist. "The moment a famous violinist refused 'to appear,'" he writes, "until he had received his check—at that moment—precisely— . . . he became but a man of 'talent'—incidentally, a small man and a small violinist, regardless of how perfectly he played."[15] No European would have seen any problem with a musician demanding money for his work, nor would any European composer (many of them reputed for shady business dealings, like Wagner, or flagrant extramarital sexual liaisons, like Liszt) have tried to draw a correspondence between personal morality and musical substance.

Paradoxically, within Ives's apologia for complex, unfamiliar-sounding music lies an American businessman's distrust for the artist as a social type, the same distrust that led Ives's teachers to prefer the music of the impeccably churchgoing Mendelssohn to that of the opium addict Berlioz. Yet, in the same writings is a Transcendental optimism that the future is wide open, that we need not compete with European culture. "Music may yet be unborn. Perhaps no music has ever been written or heard. Perhaps the birth of art will take place at the moment in which the last man who is willing to make a living out of art is gone and gone forever. In the history of this youthful world, the best product that human beings can boast of is probably Beethoven; but, maybe, even his art is as nothing in comparison with the future product of some coal-miner's soul in the forty-first century."[16] Ives's *Essays* is a brilliantly enigmatic document of the problem of the composer in American society.

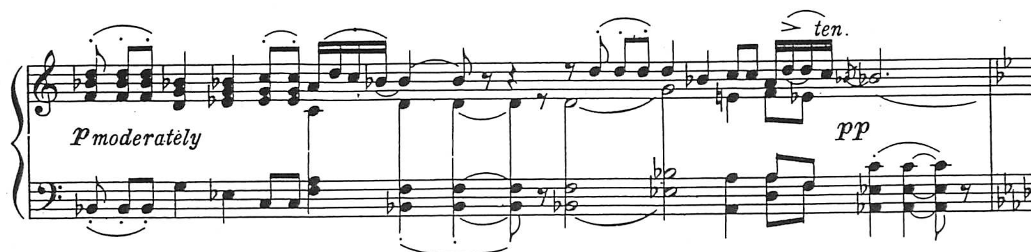
Listening Example: "Concord" Sonata, "Alcotts" movement

Ives was an impressionist, not in the French sense of using lush, coloristic harmonies like Debussy and Ravel (as was true of many other composers of his generation) but in the sense of painting tone pictures of specific scenes, atmospheres, and even intellectual ideas. (One of his college compositions, *Yale-Princeton Football Game,* was a detailed picture of what its title suggests.) Thus the "Concord" Sonata is program music—not simply a musically lucid pattern of themes and harmonic motions, but a portrait of extramusical subjects. The music does not "tell a story" in the manner of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* or Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel,* but evinces a series of emotional atmospheres. The work also anticipated, in its free, nonlinear association of motives and quotations, the stream-of-consciousness technique soon to be pioneered in literature by Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. This is the aspect of Ives's music that makes it hardest to approach for devotees of traditional classical music.

The "Concord" Sonata is so dense with ideas, crashing with volcanic harmonies and interwoven with related themes, that the listener

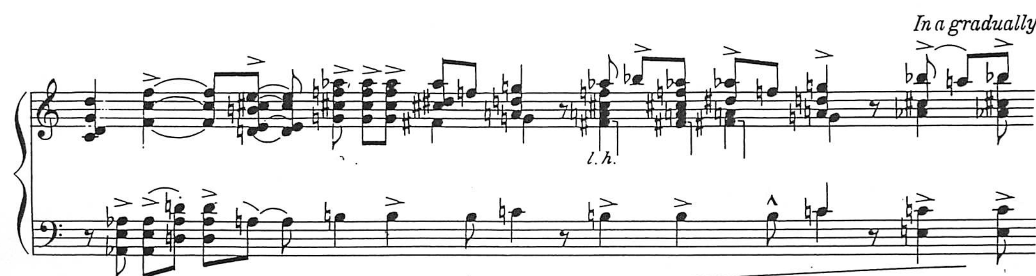
can hardly help but be confused on first hearing. However, part of the confusion comes from the reversal of the more expected movement from simplicity to complexity, for the "Concord" begins at its utmost cragginess and moves toward serene clarity. The mountains of notes seem too much to process, but on repeated hearings the work impresses such an aura of sincerity and melodic relatedness that every note comes to seem perfectly in place.

The "Concord"'s "Emerson" movement is dauntingly complex, a dense tone poem alternating between what Ives called passages of irregular "prose" and songlike "poetry." From here the sonata works its way through the ornate playfulness of "Hawthorne" to the much simpler "Alcotts" movement, based on a theme derived from the celebrated opening four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (example 1.1). This passage suggests, Ives wrote in the "Alcotts" essay, "the little spinet piano Sophia Thoreau gave to the Alcott children, on which Beth played the old Scotch airs, and played at the Fifth Symphony."[17]



EXAMPLE 1.1 Charles Ives, opening of "The Alcotts," from the "Concord" Sonata.

From this idyllic opening, the Sonata's first truly calm moment, the Beethoven's Fifth theme develops into a climax of dissonances whose unmitigated harshness no other composer had yet attempted (example 1.2). The climax relaxes into the sonata's most important theme, used cyclically in all four movements (example 1.3). The Beethoven's Fifth theme comes back in ghostly quiet, however, accompanied in chords on the whole-tone scale, after which follows a quiet middle section on a new theme. Ives evokes "the memory of that home under the elms—the



EXAMPLE 1.2 Charles Ives, "The Alcotts," from the "Concord" Sonata.

EXAMPLE 1.3 Charles Ives, "The Alcotts," from the "Concord" Sonata.

Scotch songs and the family hymns that were sung at the end of each day . . . a conviction in the power of the common soul."[18] Here and elsewhere in his music, Ives loves to toss in pianissimo treble notes dissonant to the main harmony, as overtones akin to the distant sounds heard in natural landscapes (example 1.4). This domestic new theme grows restless, and builds through bitonal dissonances into a recapitulation of the main theme, ending in a repeat of the Beethoven's Fifth theme in massive chords of pure C major.

EXAMPLE 1.4 Charles Ives, "The Alcotts," from the "Concord" Sonata.

"The Alcotts" is the Sonata's simplest movement, and usually the easiest of approach for an unfamiliar listener; "Thoreau," while still serene, moves toward bitonal mists and ambiguity, ending in C and D-flat at once. Ives was, if belatedly and not always consistently, a Transcendentalist, and Transcendentalism was an essentially antirationalist movement. For Emerson and Thoreau, logic was an insufficient tool

for gathering ultimate truths, which required the vaster, looser nets of the intuition and the unconscious. Criticisms that have met the "Concord" Sonata in recent decades for its amorphous form and lack of logical clarity exhibit a European, rationalist bias, and totally miss the point. The work is remarkable for its thematic unity, and equally remarkable for the paths it takes from that thematic center into the wild thickets of the musical unconscious.

***Listening Example:* Three Places in New England**

Three Places in New England, composed between 1903 and 1914, is Ives's most often-performed orchestral work, a set of three programmatic scenes of Connecticut and Massachusetts. The first movement, "The 'Saint-Gaudens' in Boston Common," refers to a monument by the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, depicting the Union Army's first African-American regiment under its commanding colonel Robert Gould Shaw. Mostly quiet, the piece exemplifies Ives's pictorial style: ostinatos (repeating bass lines) that carry the music forward with a ghostly tread, melody notes played deliberately offbeat as if by an amateur or exhausted band, upper overtones in the strings and piano representing distant echoes, a hint of ragtime in mid-movement, and quotation of marches and Stephen Foster's "Old Black Joe."

"Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut," the second movement, describes a boy having visions at a Fourth of July picnic, of the Goddess of Liberty encouraging the soldiers of General Israel Putnam. After an explosion of march quotations comes a pause, followed by one of Ives's favorite devices: two ensembles playing different material at different tempos. As strings and winds set up a slow march tempo, piano and percussion begin their own march 4/3 as fast as, in the boy's vision, Putnam arrives with reinforcements (example 1.5). (Slonimsky became famous for conducting this section with one hand beating each tempo.)

Like so many of Ives's instrumental works, movement three, "The Housatonic at Stockbridge," is orchestrated from a song he had written based on a poem by Robert Underwood Johnson (here excerpted):

> Contented river! and yet over-shy
> To mask thy beauty from the eager eye;
> Hast thou a thought to hide from field and town?
> In some deep current of the sunlit brown
> Art thou disquieted.

The music is a rippling continuum of polyrhythms in tempos of 6 against 8 against 10 against $26\frac{2}{3}$. A final climax accompanies the words:

> I also of much resting have a fear;
> Let me thy companion be
> By fall and shallow to the adventurous sea!

Oboe
Clarinet
Bassoon
Trumpet
Snare Drum
Piano
Violins
Violas
Cellos, Basses

EXAMPLE 1.5

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EXAMPLE 1.5 Charles Ives, polytempos from *Three Places in New England.*

The impressive calm of this texture, despite all the activity and the complications for the conductor, is a beautiful expression of Ives's philosophy of universal harmony, and one of the most enduring images in American music.

Carl Ruggles

Only one other American of Ives's generation shared his modernist tendencies. While Ives and Carl Ruggles (1876–1971) were both salty Yankee individualists (the latter born in Marion, Massachusetts), they were opposites in creative temperament. Ives was a fertile generalist capable of overlaying diverse musics into a chaotic universe; Ruggles was a single-minded, contrapuntal perfectionist who completed fewer than a dozen works. Yet Ives and Ruggles became friends after 1930 and admired each other's musics more than they did that of any other living

Carl Ruggles, John Becker, and Edgard Varèse.

composer. Ruggles's surviving works (he destroyed whatever did not meet his standards, including an unfinished early opera that he worked on for more than seven years) are tensely dissonant and unremittingly contrapuntal. With no awareness of the tone-row techniques then aborning in Europe, he developed a rigorously atonal method of never repeating a pitch until nine others had been used.

Ruggles was a colorful character who often exaggerated biographical information; accounts of his life claim that he was the grandson of a sea captain and that he attended Harvard, neither of which is true.[19] A talented violinist in youth, he did at one point play for Mrs. Grover Cleveland, though apparently without the President present. He also studied composition privately with John Knowles Paine (who taught at Harvard) and later socialized at the Harvard Club. Dogged by financial difficulties throughout his life, Ruggles worked as a conductor and violin teacher, but he was far too slow and painstaking a composer ever to augment his income through commissions or royalties. After a teaching job in Winona, Minnesota, ended prematurely, he formed the Winona Symphony Orchestra and conducted it from 1908 to 1912, often performing with his wife, the singer Charlotte (née) Snell.

His friend the artist Rockwell Kent described Ruggles as "a strange, intense little man, a bald egg-headed little man, with eyes that were alight with fervor, and a protruding lower lip that could betoken such conceit and arrogance as might defy the world, or tremble with emotion close to tears."[20] Plain-spoken and profane, Ruggles was good at convincing people he was as brilliant as he said he was, but slow to produce. The creative crisis of his life was his work from 1912 to at least 1918 on an opera, *The*

Sunken Bell, a setting in English of a German folklore play by Gerhart Hauptmann, undertaken at the request of the translator. As he labored on the piece, Ruggles's idiom evolved from a rather post-Wagnerian romanticism to an atonal style of angular melodies and harsh dissonance. He even managed to interest the management of the Metropolitan Opera in the work (though they did not agree to produce it, as has been printed), but anti-German feeling during the First World War made the completion of a German fairy opera a discouraging venture.

One last job at the Rand School in New York was Ruggles's farewell experience as a conductor. Hereafter he lived on patronage and what teaching he could find. A crucial step was meeting Henry Cowell and Charles Seeger in 1920, and Edgard Varèse two years later (for these names, see chapter 2); all shared Ruggles's fearlessly modernist tendencies, and Seeger sometimes let the Ruggleses live with him, as did Rockwell Kent in Vermont. In 1922 Ruggles became active in the International Composers Guild and the Pan American Association (of which more will be said in chapter 2), which organized the premieres of many of his works. Then, in 1924, the Ruggleses moved to an old schoolhouse in Arlington, Vermont, so inadequately heated for New England winters that they usually had to live elsewhere during the winter months. Because of a temporary eye problem, Ruggles began composing in large notes drawn on butcher paper with variously colored crayons, and kept up the habit even after his eyes improved. From 1937 to 1943, he taught seminars in modern music at the University of Florida in Miami, where his son went to college. Afterward, however, he devoted himself mainly to painting, a lifelong hobby in which he was both more prolific and more financially rewarded than in his composition.

More insecure than his blustering suggested, Ruggles relied greatly on the musical advice of his professional friends throughout his life, first Seeger and later the pianist John Kirkpatrick and the younger composer James Tenney. Unlike Ives, Ruggles did have some contact with the most advanced European music of his day, on a 1911 trip to London, Paris, and Germany and through performances presented by the International Composers Guild, including the 1923 American premiere of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire.* Although Ruggles independently arrived at the quasi-Schoenbergian practice of not repeating a pitch until nine different ones had intervened, his compositional practice always remained intuitive, characterized by trial and error, never systematic like twelve-tone music. This fact largely accounts for the snail-like pace of Ruggles's composing, the relatively small scale and number of his works. One of Henry Cowell's stories about Ruggles is a classic anecdote of American music:

> One morning when I arrived at the abandoned school house in Arlington where he [Ruggles] now lives, he was sitting at the old piano, singing a single tone at the top of his raucous composer's voice,

> and banging a single chord at intervals over and over. He refused to be interrupted in this pursuit, and after an hour or so, I insisted on knowing what the idea was. "I'm trying over this damned chord," said he, "to see whether it still sounds superb after so many hearings." "Oh," I said tritely, "time will surely tell whether the chord has lasting value." "The hell with time!" Carl replied. "I'll give this chord the test of time right now. If I find I still like it after trying it over several thousand times, it'll stand the test of time, all right!"[21]

The story says something eloquent about the need for security in the bold new world American composers were inventing from scratch.

Ruggles's output, almost all of it written after Ives had already stopped composing, includes three works for full orchestra—*Men and Mountains* (1924), *Sun-Treader* (1926–31), and *Organum* (1944); *Vox Clamans in Deserto* (1923) for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra; *Angels* for brass or string sextet (1922); *Portals* for string orchestra (1926); the song "Toys" (1919); and *Evocations* for piano (1945, also in an orchestral version), a series of tone-portraits of four friends, Ives among them. After his wife died, he also wrote in her memory an odd little dissonant hymn setting called *Exaltation* (1958); it was his last work.

Ruggles's masterpiece is unquestionably *Sun-Treader,* its title taken from Robert Browning's address to Shelley: "Sun-Treader, Light and Life be thine forever." Although Nicolas Slonimsky conducted the piece in 1932 in Paris and Berlin, it did not receive its American premiere until 1966, by which time Ruggles was too infirm to attend and virtually too deaf to hear the tape of the performance. The opening theme, whose huge leaps in the French horns bisect series of accelerating timpani strokes, is one of the most famous gestures in American music (example 1–6, which omits some octave doublings). From here the work soars in savage grandeur one moment only to sink in exhaustive despair the next, always in rigorously dissonant counterpoint. The piece is admirably unified, however, by the extensive, immediate repetition of

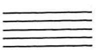
EXAMPLE 1.6 Carl Ruggles, opening measures of *Sun-Treader.*

motives among varying instrument groups, returns of the opening theme, a recurring double canon, and a loosely palindromic form (the second half repeats the themes of the first half in reverse order). Ruggles prided himself on achieving the same freedom of linear counterpoint and seamless consistency of language as the great polyphonic masters of sixteenth-century Europe, only in a dissonant rather than consonant idiom. In *Sun-Treader* he achieved that goal with a technical perfection rare in any era.

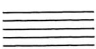
Contemporaries of Ives and Ruggles

American composers of the early twentieth century who had public music careers struggled under a plethora of historical and geographical mandates that some found debilitating. On one hand, they were tasked to demonstrate a level of formal and technical polish equal to that of the German romantic school of Schumann and Brahms. On another, they were expected to keep pace with Europe's latest modernist trends. As if that were not enough, they were also challenged by the critical press to make their music sound distinctly "American," even though no one could offer a viable definition for such a quality. Composer Henry Gilbert put the task succinctly: "American music . . . has this problem to face: that it can only become ultimately distinctive by leaving the paths of imitation, and that by leaving the paths of imitation it must temporarily sacrifice both immediate success and the respect . . . of both public and academician."[22]

To help juggle such demands, most studied in Europe. Ives and Ruggles were the only major composers of their generation who did not and whose musical outlook was not oriented toward European idioms. More typically, Americans studied with Rheinberger in Munich (like Parker and Frederick Converse), with Humperdinck in Berlin (like Arthur Farwell and Charles T. Griffes), or with d'Indy in Paris (like Daniel Gregory Mason). In addition, nearly every professional American composer of the period studied at Harvard with either Paine or Chadwick or both.



Despite the continuing tendency to choose Germany over France for one's postgraduate polish, however, the dominant influence on the generation born in the 1870s and 1880s came to be the French impressionism of Debussy and Ravel (evident even in some of the songs Ives wrote in college). Impressionism was a coloristic style given to unresolved dissonances, lush chords with added sixths, sevenths, and ninths, whole-tone scales, and a looser formal organization than the Germanic sonata. For Americans, this formal looseness offered permission to free oneself from German logic, whose formulas had often been followed pedantically. In addition, an opportunity for a definition of Americanness was opened



up by the influence of a new music growing up in the cities: jazz. Jazz harmony and impressionist harmony overlapped to some extent, making attempts at fusion attractive. The dialogue between concert music and jazz, enlivened by fertile misunderstandings on both sides, would continue throughout the century.

The best of the jazz-influenced impressionists was John Alden Carpenter (1876–1951), who, like Ives, spent his professional life outside the music business. Born in Park Ridge, Illinois, he worked as vice president of his father's Chicago shipping company, which left him sufficiently free to study in England with Edward Elgar and sufficiently wealthy to retire in 1936 to write music full time. He also studied at Harvard with Paine and in Chicago with Bernhard Ziehn (a German-born contrapuntalist whose harmonic theories, ahead of their time, have never received due acknowledgement). Carpenter's major works, if naive in their attempt at notated jazz rhythm, are nonetheless energetic and memorable. They include, notably, *Krazy Kat* (1921), the first ballet based on a popular comic strip; *Skyscrapers* (1926), a jazzy and self-consciously modernist ballet that attempted to portray the energy of the new urban life; and *Adventures in a Perambulator* (1915), a witty tone poem describing a day in the life of a baby.

Composers who avoided modernist extremes were more widely performed in their lifetimes, though they are largely forgotten today; that pattern has become a constant in America's musical life. Henry Hadley (1871–1937) was more important as a conductor but prolific and frequently performed as a composer of programmatic works with impressionist touches. Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871–1940), dean of the New England Conservatory, flirted with dissonance in *Flivver Ten Million* (1927), a tone poem celebrating the Ford company's 10 millionth car, but generally eschewed modernism's harsher effects. He is better known for his romantic tone poem after Whitman, *The Mystic Trumpeter* (1905). Daniel Gregory Mason (1873–1953), the grandson of the educator and hymn writer Lowell Mason (whose hymns Ives often quoted), took an even more conservative, neoclassic line in emulation of Brahms. Mason was held up to Ives as the model of a "respectable" composer; his String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 19 (1918–1919, revised 1930), is based on Negro songs, but so classicized as to obscure their vernacular origins.

Other composers tried more explicitly to separate from Europe and forge an American style. From 1901 to 1911, Arthur Farwell (1872–1952), a tireless worker for new American musical ideas, operated the important Wa-Wan Press (its name taken from a ceremony of the Omaha Indians) for native music that no other publishers would touch. His own works incorporated melodies of the American Indian, albeit Europeanized by notation and harmonization. Charles Wakefield Cadman (1881–1946) also garnered some small popular success with his sentimentalizations of Indian melodies. (Perhaps the most successful example of the "Indianist"

movement is the *Two Indian Sketches* of Charles T. Griffes, who is discussed below.) Likewise, the largely self-taught Henry F. Gilbert (1868–1928) shocked audiences by using Creole slave songs and African rhythms in such works as *The Dance in Place Congo* (1906).

Charles Tomlinson Griffes

One of the great figures of the impressionist movement, along with Debussy and Ravel, was an American: Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884–1920). Unlike the isolated Ives, Griffes was the first American original to work in the context of international modernism. While he worshipped Debussy, he was also influenced by Scriabin and familiar with the music of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. When the publisher G. Schirmer at first declined to publish Griffes's more "modernistic" compositions, the great Italian pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni intervened. Griffes's piano works and *Poem for Flute and Orchestra* stand as equals next to the best of Debussy's smaller masterpieces; their popularity has never faded, nor have they needed revival.

Born in Elmira, New York, Griffes borrowed money from his piano teacher, Mary Selena Broughton, to study piano and composition in Berlin, which he did from 1903 to 1907; his composition teachers were Philippe Rufer and Engelbert Humperdinck. He returned to join the faculty at the Hackley School for Boys in Tarrytown, New York. In the last year of his life, the New York Philharmonic premiered his *Poem for Flute and Orchestra* and the Boston Symphony played his tone poem *The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan.* Both were greeted with gratifying critical acclaim, sending him well on his way to becoming the most celebrated American composer of his day. But sadly, dogged by poverty (he supported his mother and sister and repaid Broughton on a slim salary), he virtually worked himself to death. Unable to afford having the orchestral parts for *Kubla Khan* copied, he copied them himself in the midst of teaching and other musical projects. Under the strain, pneumonia set in and turned to empyema, which robbed America of its first acknowledged musical genius at the age of thirty-five.

Griffes's works include a tone poem, *The Pleasure Dome of Kubla Khan* (1919, after Coleridge's poem), a *Poem for Flute and Orchestra* (1919), a dance drama, *The Kairn of Koridwen; Two Sketches for String Quartet Based on Indian Themes* (1922); *Roman Sketches* for piano (1915–1916, including *The White Peacock,* which also exists in an orchestrated version); *Three Tone Pictures* for piano (1915); a Piano Sonata in F (1917–1918), and more than forty songs.

***Listening Example:* The White Peacock**

Griffes wrote his *Roman Sketches,* Op. 7, in 1915–1916. Each is associated in the score with a poem by the mystical Celtic poet William Sharp, who

published his poems as a woman's, under the pseudonym Fiona Macleod, perpetrating a hoax not discovered until his death. Visiting the Berlin Zoological Garden with Miss Broughton in 1903, Griffes had been struck by an albino peacock, after which he began collecting pictures of white peacocks. Griffes tended to choose titles of poetic allusion, but only after the music was written, and in this case he claimed that the theme came to him while he was watching a sunset. Nevertheless, he kept Macleod's poem *The White Peacock* on the piano while composing the work. Later, he published the piece along with three other tone poems with Macleod affinities as *Roman Sketches,* another Macleod title, and made a version for orchestra in 1919. In part, the poem reads as follows:

> Here where the sunlight
> Floodeth the garden,
> Where the pomegranate
> Reareth its glory
> Of gorgeous blossom;
> Where the oleanders
> Dream through the noontides; . . .
> Moves the white peacock, as tho' through the noontide
> A dream of the moonlight were real for a moment.

Griffes's tone poem opens with a lithe seven-against-three rhythmic figure leading to a chord of the dominant ninth typical of impressionist harmony (idea A, example 1.7). The second motive is a chromatic scale over the harmony of idea A, leading to the work's seminal motive of a rising whole-step in dotted rhythm (idea B, example 1.8). Idea C combines the harmony of A with the final motive of B (example 1.9). Idea C is developed with variations, including a theme in 5/4 meter over arpeggios, marked *con languore* (with languor), leading at last to a playful chromatic motive. After a climax, idea B returns, *subito pianissimo,* sometimes with the chromatic scale in one hand and the dotted-note whole-step motive in the other. Again, a flowingly romantic melody returns to idea B, followed by a recapitulation of idea C with intensified harmonization. At the end, idea A makes a final, mysterious appearance, dying away without resolving.

EXAMPLE 1.7 Griffes, *The White Peacock,* Idea A.

EXAMPLE 1.8 Griffes, *The White Peacock,* Idea B.

EXAMPLE 1.9 Griffes, *The White Peacock,* Idea C.

The White Peacock's harmonies and motives are similar to those of Debussy's style, while its pungent chromatics and the inconclusive ending owe more to the influence of Scriabin. And yet, the piece is perfectly unified, with its own sense of motive and harmonic progression. "One cannot possibly play the new composers much," Griffes wrote, "without being influenced by them in one's own compositions. But I do have a deathly fear of becoming one of the dull imitators of the innovators. There are already enough of those."[23] Griffes was no imitator, but an American master of the impressionist idiom.

Notes

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2. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), p. 25.
3. William Bentley, quoted in "William Billings," *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music,* H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds. (London: MacMillan Press, 1988), Vol. I, p. 215.
4. Quoted in the liner notes to *The Continental Harmony: Music of William Billings,* Columbia MS 7277.
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Crawford, R. Allen Lott, and Carol J. Oja, eds., *A Celebration of American Music: Words and music in honor of H. Wiley Hitchcock* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 257.

6. Ibid., p. 258.
7. Ibid., p. 260.
8. Charles Ives, *Memos* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), p. 48.
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12. Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962), p. 22.
13. Ibid., p. 75.
14. Ibid., p. 97.
15. Ibid., p. 87.
16. Ibid., pp. 88–89.
17. Ibid., p. 47.
18. Ibid., p. 48.
19. Information on Ruggles's life comes from Marilyn Ziffrin, *Carl Ruggles: Composer, Painter, Storyteller* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
20. Quoted in Ziffrin, *Carl Ruggles*, pp. 41–42.
21. Cowell, "Carl Ruggles: A Note," in Lou Harrison, *About Carl Ruggles* (Yonkers, New York: Oscar Baradinsky at the Alicat Bookshop, 1946), p. 1.
22. Henry F. B. Gilbert, "The American Composer," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (April 1915): pp. 94–104; reprinted in Gilbert Chase, ed., *The American Composer Speaks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1966), p. 102.
23. Letter, November 30, 1911, quoted in Edward Maisel, "Griffes and the Piano," liner notes for New World Records NW 310/311, 1981.