

CHARLES IVES 1874-1954

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October 30 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of a very important American composer, Charles Ives. Since biographical information on Ives is easily available and is well known, there is no purpose in repeating such data here. Interested musicians know of his life in New England, his successful insurance business accompanied by an active compositional life until his health forced an early retirement, and his father's important role in Ives' life. The reader is referred to Henry and Sidney Cowell's *Charles Ives and His Music* (Oxford Univ. Press) and John Kirkpatrick's *Charles E. Ives Memos* (W. W. Norton & Co.) for more complete information on Ives' life and entire music output. The purpose here is to remind conductors of this anniversary and encourage performance of Ives' music.

In addition to this 100th anniversary of his birth, conductors can also include performances of Ives' music on Bicentennial concerts or Bicentennial celebrations that include choral music. Ives' Centennial year coincides beautifully with the Bicentennial plans.

The choral music of Charles Ives occupies an important place in his total output and does not take a back seat to any of his excellent instrumental works. His choral writing is very strong, straight forward, masculine writing, without a trace of "Rollo"! When bi-tonality best expresses Ives' intent it is used, but when C major best expresses his intent it is used without apology. The highly acclaimed *Psalm 90* is an example of both of these types of writing; rich, exciting bi-tonality and simple but beautiful passages in C major, including the marvelous final hymn. Mrs. Ives has been quoted as saying Ives considered *Psalm 90* his most satisfying work; the one that came the closest to expressing his original intentions.

Charles Ives was a church organist for fifteen years during which he "tried out" several of his *Psalm* settings. He remarked that his *Psalm 67* presented certain problems for his singers (problems we have all experienced). Ives said the singers had difficulty maintaining the two keys (g minor and C major) and that he remembered a performance when he played the men's parts on the organ while the treble parts were sung. Of

course, he also mentioned supporting the entire choir with organ. If *Psalm 67* strikes audiences sharply today, consider what it must have done to the congregation in Ives' church at the turn of the century.

Listed below are representative choral works of Charles Ives. Most of the works are difficult and many conductors will not have the choral forces necessary to perform some of these pieces. There are, however, some unison pieces that can be performed successfully by many choirs at many levels. Of course, we want to perform Ives' music at the highest possible level but, at the same time, we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that Ives appreciated enthusiasm as deeply as accuracy. If a young choir can't quite negotiate all the parts at the end of *Circus Band*, I feel quite sure Ives would not have objected to a hearty and enthusiastic unison ending. The spirit of the music is as important as the "sound" of the music. Ives' father is quoted as remarking about a camp-meeting singer who sang loudly but not too accurately, "Old John is a supreme musician. Look into his face and hear the music of the ages. Don't pay too much attention to the sounds. If you do, you may miss the music . . ." (1) Charles Ives shared his father's view. It is all but impossible to approach Ives' music with anything but outright enthusiasm. I hope there will be thousands of performances of the music of Charles Ives this year and during the Bicentennial.

PSALM 90

SATB, organ and bells
Mercury Music Corp.

This most beautiful of all settings is a marvelous musical experience for both performer and listener. The ostinato C in the organ provides a base on which the bitonal choral parts are built. The superimposed major seventh chords, for example, (d, f-sharp, a, c-sharp in the men's voices and e, g-sharp, b, d-sharp in the ladies' voices) are most difficult to tune perfectly but create an exciting choral sonority. Passages of bitonal writing alternate with contrasting simpler choral scoring. Some of the most moving choral writing appears in the last section — a hymn in C major with the bells adding a bitonal element. *Psalm 90* has had many performances since its long awaited publication in 1971 but this should not prevent anyone from another performance of this beautiful score.

THREE HARVEST HOME CHORALES

SATB, organ, brass, double bass (or organ reduction)
Mercury Music Corp. MC 446

Stronger more virile settings do not exist in the choral repertoire than these chorales. However, they are very difficult and not very many conductors will be able to perform them. If it is only the instruments that can't be found, the organ reduction is a good substitute. Where opportunities for performance exist, don't pass these settings by.

PSALM 150

4-part treble chorus, and SATB Chorus and optional organ
Merion Music (Theodore Presser Co., representative)



CHARLES E. IVES

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Although again difficult, the combination of the two choirs provides a heavy treble sonority (often the soprano and alto of the mixed choir is also divided creating 8 women's parts over 2 men's parts. A short setting with character and certainly worthy of performance. An opportunity to combine two good choirs.

CHARLIE RUTLAGE A-615 WALKING A-613 EVENING A-614

Unison Chorus
Assoc. Pub.

All three are from Ives' songs for solo voice. *Walking* was composed 1900-02 and the other two 1920-21 according to Kirkpatrick's *Memos*. If one is unable to perform the more difficult scores, these pieces are most enjoyable and the unison makes them easier. Don't be misled, though, not all singers will find the intervals easy. The four hand piano acc. contributes much to the success of these pieces.

CIRCUS BAND

SATB, piano four hands
Southern Music Corp.

One of the most fun pieces of all! The parts in the last chorus are delightful although one will often need to reassign some voices to bring out desired parts. The piano substitutes for instrumental parts (a chorus-band score is available and highly recommended). Vigor and enthusiasm are musts; anything less than that will be most undesirable. **Not Hard.**

PSALM 67

SATB A Cappella
Assoc. Music Pub.

Probably the best known *Psalm* setting, it nevertheless deserves repeated performances this year. It is the first choral work recorded by a major recording company (Paul Lehman 1937-Columbia Rec. Co.) and was performed by Robert Shaw in 1948 with the Collegiate Chorale. The latter performance coincided with a rising interest in Ives' music and *Psalm 67* has since had many performances and recordings. A B A in form with the A

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sections set bitonally (g minor and C major), the work is still a challenge for a choir of solid singers. The strength of the fugal middle section balances the strong bitonal writing.

CELESTIAL COUNTRY

SATB solos, solo quartet
Mixed chorus, strings, brass, and organ
Peer International

A lengthy cantata composed in 1898-99, CELESTIAL COUNTRY was reviewed favorably in 1902 in both the *New York Times* and the *Musical Courier*, evidently the first Ives work to be reviewed. Conductors may find the work quite long but are urged to examine it for possible excerpting as well as for complete performance. A score with organ accompaniment is also available.

GENERAL BOOTH ENTERS INTO HEAVEN

Solo voice (bar) chorus and orchestra
Rental from Theodore Presser 4 minutes long

Again, not an easy work but a good university or civic chorus could sing the work successfully and would find the rehearsals and performances very enjoyable and rewarding. A four-hand piano accompaniment is available but wherever orchestras exist bring this work to their attention; they will view it favorably as an addition to their concert.

DISCOGRAPHY

Charles Ives: Music for Chorus
Gregg Smith Singers
Columbia Records MS6921
General William Booth Enters Into Heaven
Serenity
A Circus Band
December
The New River
Three Harvest Home Chorales
Psalm 100
Psalm 67
Psalm 24
Psalm 90
Psalm 150
New Music of Charles Ives
Gregg Smith Singers
Columbia Records MS7321
Let There Be Light
Psalm 14
Psalm 54
Psalm 25
Psalm 125
Walt Whitman
Duty
Vita On the Antipodes
Seven Other Selected Songs
Charles Ives: The 100th Anniversary
Columbia Records M4-32504
A Multi Records set including CELESTIAL COUNTRY recorded by Gregg Smith Singers and other new releases both instrumental and vocal.
Three Harvest Home Chorales
Robert Shaw Chorale RCA Victor LSC-2676
Turn Ye, Turn Ye
John Jaeger, baritone, Hamlin A Cappella Choir
Robert Holliday Music in America #116
The following works should also be considered for performance and many conductors may find that one or more meets their specific needs.
PROCESSIONAL: Let There Be Light
Men's Chorus Peer International
EASTER CAROL
Solo quartet, SATB and organ
Assoc. Music Pub.

PSALM 24
SATB Chorus A Cappella
Mercury Music
PSALM 25
SATB Chorus A Cappella
Mercury Music Corp.
SERENITY
Unison Chorus and piano
Associated Music Publishers
DECEMBER
Unison Men's chorus wind instruments
Peer International
LINCOLN THE GREAT COMMONER
Unison Chorus orchestra piano
New Music Publication-Theodore Presser

FOOTNOTE

1. Cowell, Henry and Sidney, **Charles Ives and His Music**; London; Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 24. ❖

A new project of Information Coordinators, Inc., Detroit Reprints in Music will provide standard and specialized works about music in a variety of areas. The first title reprinted is **Conductors Critics and Composers** by Claire R. Reis. Information Coordinators, Inc., also publishes *The Music Index*.

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The second annual Jazz Composers Contest has been announced by the National Association of Jazz Educators which is open to both students and jazz educators actively engaged in teaching in a private or public school. Original compositions must be postmarked no later than November 1, 1974. For complete information write Matt Betton, Executive Secretary, NAJE, Box 742, Manhattan, Kansas 66502.



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