

**CHARLES
IVES**

**The Sonatas
for
Violin and
Piano**

**GREGORY
FULKERSON**
violin

**ROBERT
SHANNON**
piano



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The Sonatas for Violin and Piano
Gregory Fulkerson, violin • Robert Shannon, piano



 **BRIDGE**®

CHARLES IVES

(1874 - 1954)

DISC ONE

Sonata No. 1 (22:56)

- 1 Andante (6:39)
- 2 Largo cantabile (6:36)
- 3 Allegro (9:32)

Sonata No. 2 (15:31)

- 4 Autumn (5:47)
- 5 In the Barn (4:38)
- 6 The Revival (4:48)

DISC TWO

Sonata No. 3 (30:04)

- 1 Adagio; Andante; Allegretto; Adagio (15:05)
- 2 Allegro (4:30)
- 3 Adagio cantabile (10:21)

Sonata No. 4 "Children's Day at the Camp Meeting" (11:04)

- 4 Allegro (2:22)
- 5 Largo (6:55)
- 6 Allegro (1:41)

Gregory Fulkerson, violin • Robert Shannon, piano

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NOTES

by James Hepokoski

Between 1902 and 1915 Charles Ives worked intermittently on a dozen individual movements for violin and piano, which he grouped into three- or four-movement sonatas. The composer himself actively supervised the publication of only one of them, the Fourth Sonata. This appeared in an early, four-movement version, which he had privately lithographed in 1914-15, and it was later, more "officially," republished in 1942, without its original fourth movement and with some revisions of the other movements. The remaining three—all three-movement sonatas—were published in the final years of his life, at the beginning of the post World War II, avant-garde "Ives boom": the second and third in 1951 (the second sonata ends with the fourth's "original" 1915 finale) and, finally, the first in 1953.

As is typical of much of his music the four sonatas often strike us as collage of vernacular tunes that Ives had heard, under his father's direction, as a boy in Danbury, Connecticut:

scraps of camp-meeting hymns, Civil War or other patriotic tunes, popular dances, and so on. In the violin sonatas Ives reworked these memory-traces and swirled them together in stubbornly original juxtapositions of traditional or almost traditional harmonies, "wrong-note" harmonies, and emphatically dissonant harmonies—polychords, chordal clusters or near-clusters, freely "experimental" counterpoint, and so on.

In this radicalized, multifaceted reappropriation of commonplace reality-fragments lies the heart of the composer's aesthetic. For Ives these unsophisticated (and notably "dated") tunes became truth-bearing icons, sacred and authentic relics of his own childhood. From a psychological perspective, in these sonatas we may be overhearing Ives's longing to recover the wholeness of a golden age of parental security no longer available to him in his current, adult life with all of its conflicting, disturbing demands. On the other hand, from a more purely aesthetic perspective,

his quotations strive vehemently to overcome the separation of "Art" (capital "A") from everyday life. The uncoupling of "Art" from the affairs of daily *praxis* had been one of the determining features of nineteenth-century European "Art-Music" for well over a century, and its intellectually separatist attitudes had been imported, albeit in a rigid, simplified fashion, into the American "genteel" high-culture against which Ives was so furiously rebelling. As is well known, he had only contempt for the claim that "Art" should remove us out of the blunt-edged realities of everyday, personal experience and into an elegantly aestheticized or elitist redemptive space. On the contrary, his music hopes to throw us back into everyday life to seek our transcendence there—an idea that, by the 1920s, he would explicitly associate with those espoused by the nineteenth-century New England Transcendentalists, especially Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne.

As if repeatedly illustrating this quest for transcendence through an acceptance of the commonplace, many of Ives's individual pieces or

movements follow a similar narrative structure. A typical movement, for instance, might consist of an ardently dissonant (for Ives, "mystical") working-through of a set of familiar, vernacular musical symbols (or, as an alternative, the frequent returning to fragments of a sentimental or sacred tune interspersed with freer, personal reflections on the experience) that leads to some sort of *forte* climax near the end. This "peak experience," however, ultimately spends its energy and dissipates in a non-closed *diminuendo* fade-out: a suggestion of becoming one with the silence of the "cosmos," perhaps, or becoming one with the Emersonian "oversoul." Of the twelve movements in the four violin sonatas all but three (the second movements of the Second and Third Sonatas and the "special-ending" finale of the Fourth) conclude with some type of this "dissolving" close.

Because of his conviction that the path to such revelations depends on an unashamed affirmation of the everyday at each step along the way, in his music Ives challenged the central separatist postulate of "Art Music."

Yet—and here is the paradox—he would attempt to deconstruct the normative content of "Art Music" while frequently embracing its performance norms (and often its standard textures or expressive contours): the lurking tradition of a Beethoven, a Brahms or a Dvorák is also strongly felt in these sonatas. This paradoxical juxtaposition, the using of the traditional means of "Art" to express "Anti-Art," is the driving dialectic of Ives's music, and it is one that, like the music itself, resists closure and should remain unresolved.

The First Sonata (written primarily between 1902 and 1908) opens with an emphatically contrapuntal movement in the style that Lou Harrison called Ives's "rhapsodic informal polyphony." The striding, canonic opening in the piano, *Andante* (which may allude, as John Kirkpatrick has suggested, to the last phrase of the hymn *Autumn*) soon branches out to eloquent utterances in the Romantic-lyrical (and almost "traditional") violin. The movement's more aggressive center section, an expansive *Allegro vivace*, begins in a similarly contrapuntal vein, but gradually grows into

clearer evocations of "The Shining Shore" and "Bringing in the Sheaves" before cycling back into a variant of the opening *Andante*. In the final bars of the *diminuendo* and *rallentando* close, the violin drifts toward both the key, D major, and the theme of the movement to follow. The intensely personal second movement is grounded not merely in the familiar tune, "The Old Oaken Bucket," but in its opening two lines, which may be regarded as a heartfelt confession from Ives himself: "How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood, / When fond recollection presents them to view." Its central section also contains reminiscences of "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp," and again, it is not the title but the specific lines that are telling: "In the prison cell I sit, / Thinking, Mother dear, of you." The central image of the more aggressive *Allegro* finale is "night," a symbol both of death and of the Ivesian transcendental mysteries. The outer sections are grounded on fragments from Lowell Mason's marchlike, industrious "Work for the Night is Coming," and the center section—first *Con Moto*,

then a meditative *Andante cantabile*—extensively quotes Mason's "Watchman Tell Us of the Night": at the *Andante cantabile* Ives actually places the text of the hymn under the violin part.

In the Second Sonata (1902-1909) Ives provided evocative titles for the three movements. The first, named after Barthélemon's hymn *Autumn* (one version of whose text is "Mighty God, While Angels Bless Thee") is a free double-variation on two ideas: its basic pattern is A-B / A'-B' / A"-B" (although the B-idea, which begins with the first two lines of *Autumn* sounded in the violin, is usually accompanied, at least at the outset, by some form of A in the piano). The first and second themes are at first sharply differentiated by tempo: the first is slow, the second quite brisk. The third statement of the pair, however, invites them to share a common tempo, *Meno allegro con moto*: thus the two "tempo-opposites" are brought together by the end of the movement. The second movement, "In the Barn," is a collage of brisk dance rhythms and country-fiddling figurations that turns patriotic at its

close—George F. Root's "The Battle Cry of Freedom"—and ends with a shout. The ternary final movement, "The Revival," follows its slow, "transcendental" introduction with a set of free variations on John Wyeth's *Nettleton*, "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," which increases in complexity, speed, and intensity until the final *diminuendo* and braking into the closing bars. The "dissolving" fade-out into *ppp* concludes with a brief scrap of *Nettleton*—something on the order, one supposes, of a final, fragmentary reverberation of the whole preceding movement.

The Third Sonata (1905-1914), the longest of the set, opens with a movement recalling on "Beulah Land," "I Hear Thy Welcome Voice," and "I Need Thee Every Hour." It unfolds in a hymnlike, varied strophic form: in the score Ives designates four rather free "verses"—*Adagio*, *Andante*, *Allegretto*, and, once again, *Adagio*. Each of these verses begins soberly and then expands at length into complex, rhapsodic thought; and each invariably closes with the same, simpler "refrain" tune. (It is first heard several minutes into the

movement, in the piano alone.) The second movement, *Allegro*, based on syncopated, "rag" rhythms along with "There'll Be No Dark Valley" and "O Happy Day" (which would later be adapted into the Prohibition tune, "How Dry I Am"), scarcely pauses anywhere in its incessant sonorous outpouring: the effect, quite different from that of the other movements of the sonatas, is of a relatively up-to-date, if ceaselessly spinning, "modernity." (Ives also scored an early version of the movement for a small theater orchestra.) In the third movement, constructed from fragments of Robert Lowry's "I Need Thee Every Hour," we grow from murky instability to focussed certainty. Toward the end of the movement, at the conclusion of an extended passage for piano alone, the piano begins to sound an oscillating, ostinato figure in the bass, over which the violin re-enters and builds to a full statement of the hymn's refrain, sounded *maestoso* with climactic "Ivesian clarity." (The relevant text: "I need Thee, O I need Thee, / Every hour I need Thee; / O bless me now, my Saviour, / I come to Thee.")

The Fourth Sonata (1906-1915), the briefest of them, but clearly the one that Ives considered the most "finished," is subtitled "Children's Day at the Camp Meeting," and the composer himself provided a set of programmatic notes for it at the end of the 1942 score. The first movement, a sturdy *Allegro* march—the boys in his day liked to march about during the rhythmic hymns and indulge in off-key singing, Ives tells us—is based on "Work for the Night is Coming" (as in the First Sonata), "Tell Me the Old, Old Story," and one of his father's fugues (recalling young Charles's organ practice, which is interrupted by and overlaid with the boys' marching-tunes). The second movement—in some respects parallel to the confessional central movement of the First Sonata—is an *Adagio* meditation on the final phrases of William Bradbury's "Jesus Loves Me" (whose texts involves a threefold repetition of "Yes, Jesus loves me" that leads to a concluding, "The Bible tells me so"). At its opening the rhapsodic violin sings and reflects on the tune-fragments while the piano underneath searches out

"mystical" open-fifth and dissonant harmonies. The center section, *forte* and boisterously active for piano alone, seeks to provide a maximal contrast to the outer sections: Ives marks it *Allegro (conlugarocko)*, which, he tells us, refers to the moments during the church services when the young boys were allowed out to "throw stones down on the rocks in the brook!" In the second movement's final section it is the piano who first leads with "Yes, Jesus Loves Me," until it is handed over once more to the violin, and the whole closes with a reverent *pppp*, "Amen" close, sparkling like a star in the piano high above the low violin. The finale, based on "Shall We Gather at the River?", brings us back to the marches of the first movement. Like Ives's well-known song based on the tune, it ends with the directly-posed question of the hymn's first line. (Compare this, for example, with the final "Nettleton" gesture of the Second Sonata.) The movement thus resists closure and empties its "Art" directly onto the everyday-life lap of the listener, from whom—so it would seem—some sort of response (beyond mere applause) is expected.

Gregory Fulkerson became the last of the many violin students of Ivan Galamian to win a competition in the legendary teacher's lifetime when he won the first prize of the 1980 International American Music Competition sponsored by the Kennedy Center and the Rockefeller Foundation. Since then he has had a busy career performing both traditional and unusual repertoire, earning special praise for his performances of Bach, Brahms, Sibelius, and Barber. He has been particularly active in American music, including first performances of concerti by Roy Harris and John Becker, commissioned works by Donald Erb, Jon Deak, and Stephen Dembski, and well-received recordings of American music by Philip Glass, Leo Ornstein, Aaron Copland, Richard Wernick, Roy Harris, Stephen Gerber, John Melby, Ed Miller, and Michael Daugherty for New World, CRI, Opus One, and Albany Records. In 1986, he gave the premiere of Richard Wernick's concerto with Riccardo Muti conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Mr. Fulkerson was born in Iowa City in 1950. He earned a degree in mathematics from Oberlin College and received the D.M.A. from The Juilliard School in 1987. His non-musical interests also include chess and mountain climbing, an activity he pursues at the Grand Teton Music Festival where he has been in residence since 1975. He is a member of the artist faculty at the Oberlin Conservatory. Mr. Fulkerson plays a violin made by J. B. Guadagnini of Turin in 1774.



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