

“the searching questions of what?- and why?”



Charles Ives's *Symphony No. 4*

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- the question and the questioner -

In 1908, Charles Ives completed a small orchestral piece that would eventually (although the composer never could have guessed this) become his most famous work. Called *The Unanswered Question*, the piece is an early example of two Ivesian hallmarks: the division of music into independently functioning layers, and the exploration of transcendental themes through art.

The Unanswered Question is made up of three independent elements which compete with one another for the attention of the listener. First heard are the strings – described by Ives as “The Silence of the Druids, who Know, See and Hear Nothing” – drifting through a slow progression of chords in the key of G-Major. Next comes a solo trumpet, which solemnly intones a non-tonal melody (“The Perennial Question of Existence”). The trumpet is answered by a chorus of winds, but they can't seem to agree – the response is muddled, confused. Six times the trumpet asks its question. Six times the winds respond, growing more and more frenetic. But as the piece concludes, no consensus has been reached: the trumpet's seventh, final call goes unanswered, and all that remains is the eternal silence, disappearing into the distance.

The Unanswered Question, concluding bars.

At this point in his life, Ives was ready to ask the big questions – what is the meaning of existence? – what is the meaning of art? – but he was not yet sure of the solutions to his queries. For the moment, the perennial question of existence remained unresolved. But Ives was not the sort of person who was content to let matters rest. Two years after drawing a double bar at the end of *The Unanswered Question*, he scratched the first few notes of what would become his most ambitious, complex, and (ultimately) triumphant completed work: the fourth symphony. For nearly a decade and a half, Ives labored on this piece. It is his most coherent philosophical statement, his most intimidating musical achievement, and the ideological sequel to the 1908 miniature.

In the fourth symphony, however, simply asking the big questions would not be enough. This time, Ives demanded answers.

- background -

In 1874, Richard Wagner was finishing the orchestration of *Götterdämmerung*. Johannes Brahms was unveiling his first two string quartets, and sketching the first of four symphonies. Claude Debussy was in the second of ten years as a student at the Paris Conservatoire. Franz Liszt, a resident of Rome now, still traveled occasionally to perform, conduct, and teach. And on October 20, across the ocean, Charles (or Charlie) Ives was born in Danbury, Connecticut, USA, a town whose musical life could hardly have been further removed from that in the great capitals of Europe. It was a place Charlie would spend his whole life simultaneously memorializing and attempting to flee.

George Ives, Charlie's father, was a jack-of-all-trades musician – essentially the only professional in Danbury. A former bandmaster in the American Civil War, he led the town band, directed theater music, played the bugle for formal events, and conducted the choir at church on Sundays. Indispensable as he was to the town, George was seen by the residents of Danbury (who stuffily cherished their village's reputation as the leading New England manufacturer of hats) as a bit of an odd duck. After all, musical culture in gilded age America was dominated by women and amateurs. Someone attempting to make a career out of performing and conducting music was, by default, an outlier. But George's oddness went beyond this – he was a great musical experimenter. As an adult, Charles Ives would recount endless stories about his father's sonic tinkering. Once (Charles claimed), George stretched violin strings across a hallway and dangled small weights from them to create quarter-tones. Another time, he marched two bands (playing in two different keys) towards one another on the town green, just to hear the cacophonous result.



George Ives in his Civil War Uniform



Charlie, ca. 1889

Charlie grew up in his father's musical world – a world which was distinct, and distinctly American. As a young person, his exposure to the concert hall or opera house was minimal. Most of the music-making which surrounded him was both non-professional and communal - church hymns, holiday marches, and social fiddling. These sources, in addition to George's unconventional inclinations, formed the backbone of Charlie's upbringing and would be incorporated into his compositions from the outset.

George was delighted when his son displayed an early proclivity for music. Charlie played bass drum in his father's Methodist band as early as age five (he practiced by banging on a piano with his fists), and by age 12 was an accomplished enough pianist to perform in public. Eventually, he found his niche as a church organist, in which capacity he worked professionally starting in 1888

(the youngest salaried church organist in Connecticut). It's often forgotten that Ives was, as a young man at least, an unbelievably skilled performer. At age 14, he spent four hours per day at the keyboard and noted proudly in his diary that he'd mastered Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in C-Major*. Soon, the younger Ives was in constant demand as a soloist.

In his teenage years, however, Ives became aware of two troubling aspects of New England society. First, their tastes ran strongly to the conservative side – even Brahms was far too outrageous for the society women who attended his recitals (they preferred Mozart and Rossini transcriptions).¹ This did not sit well with the loyal son of George Ives, who had recently begun sketching ideas for his own compositions involving polytonality and the like. Second, Charlie began to realize that Danbury considered his father – and, by extension, himself – an outcast. As a relative explained some years later, “Of course Danbury thought that that [George's musical activity] was just kind of foolishness. Music and art were not things you really worked at. They were entertainment.”

From 1888 through 1893, the societal pressures wore away at both father and son. Hoping to make a better (and more consistent) living, George Ives glumly accepted a job at a bank in 1891. Mocked by other boys because of his lack of athleticism, Charlie persuaded his parents to let him play baseball, and then football. At both activities, he eventually excelled, but his grades (and practice time) began to suffer. In 1893, Charlie's academic performance had slumped to the point where he was in danger of being denied entrance to Yale. To salvage the situation, George sent his son to Hopkins Preparatory school in New Haven for a yearlong crash course in literature and languages. In the Autumn of 1894, Charlie was admitted to Yale to study music.



Charles Ives (left) and a Hopkins Baseball Club teammate, Spring 1894.

In November 1894, just a few months after Charlie began college, George Ives passed away suddenly at the age of 49. The timing of George's death – occurring just as Charlie encountered a very different, European-influenced brand of musical training – was almost certainly a significant reason for his loyal son's eventual rejection of traditional techniques and embrace of his father's experimental techniques. Additionally, and somewhat tragically, George Ives's passing may have prejudiced Ives against Horatio Parker, his composition professor at Yale, from the get-go.

¹ The term “nice ladies” would remain in Ives's vocabulary – as an epithet – for the remainder of his life.

Parker (1863-1919) was a Massachusetts-born composer and pedant who had studied in Munich, Germany for several years with the famous Lichtenstein teacher Josef Rheinberger. Although traditional in his tastes, he was a talented composer and would eventually earn widespread (if fleeting) acclaim for his massive oratorio, *Horus Novissima*. As a teacher, he emphasized the importance of craft: under him, Charlie Ives spent many hours laboring on counterpoint exercises and orchestration drills. Ives, already naturally contrary and primed for combativeness by the death of his father, chafed under Parker's tutelage while at the same time absorbing more of the older man's style than he would ever acknowledge.²



Horatio Parker at work



Ives as a college senior, ca. 1898

During his four years at Yale, Ives managed to project a facade of easy popularity while simultaneously playing several sports, working as an organist at Center Church, and working into the night on various compositional projects. Unsurprisingly, his nickname on campus was “Dasher,” because he was constantly dashing from place to place. Ives was a social success, even becoming a member of the Wolf's Head, one of Yale's prestigious secret societies. Although his classmates were aware that he was a musician of some kind, few realized the extent of his talent or ambitions.

In 1898, Ives graduated armed with an impressive web of social connections and a portfolio brimming with compositions. The most impressive of these was the *Symphony No. 1*, a lushly orchestrated Romantic work in the style of Dvorak or (although Ives would have bristled to hear it) Horatio Parker. But other notable works from this time, such as the choral setting *Psalm 150* and the piano piece (later orchestrated) *Yale-Princeton Football Game*, show that Ives's more experimental side remained intact.

After graduation, Ives moved to New York City and lived with several former classmates while working both as a church organist and a clerk at Mutual Life Insurance Co. The two careers progressed side by side until 1902. In that year, Ives arranged for the premiere of what he considered his most impressive (or at least marketable) work to date: a cantata entitled *The Celestial Country*. The cantata – which bears more than a passing resemblance to Parker's *Horus Novissima*) was received poorly by audience and critics alike.³ This artistic disappointment, contrasted with the success he was experiencing as a businessman, may have pushed Ives towards his next step. In 1902,

2 As an old man, Ives denied that Parker taught him anything (a statement which was demonstrably untrue) and credited George with the whole of his musical education. “Parker was a composer, and widely known,” (he wrote in his *Memos*) “and Father was not a composer and little known – but from every other standpoint I should say that Father was by far the greater man.”

3 One reviewer wrote in the *Musical Courier*, “The work shows undoubted earnestness in study... and was fairly credibly done” – faint praise which undoubtedly stuck in Ives's craw.

he resigned his post as organist at Central Presbyterian Church and renounced the life of a professional musician. From this point forward, Ives's composition was confined to his spare time. It would be twenty years before he had another formal premiere.

With his considerable energy now focused on the insurance industry, Ives achieved incredible success as a businessman. In 1906, he and a friend named Julian Myrick started their own firm. Ives & Myrick Insurance Co. would quickly become a major player in the field, and make both of its founders very wealthy. By 1913, Ives was making \$10,000 per year (over \$125,000 today). By 1920, he was the equivalent of a multimillionaire.



Julian Myrick, later in life



Harmony Twichell, in her nursing uniform

Ives's independence from the formal musical establishment initially had a liberating creative effect. Released from the constraints of composing with the public in mind, he developed a style which was uniquely radical and kaleidoscopic. Between 1902 and 1908, he wrote several of the works which would later help to cement his legacy: *Robert Browning Overture*, the second symphony, *Central Park in the Dark*, and others.

Simultaneously (in 1905), Ives began a formal courtship of Harmony Twichell, a preacher's daughter and amateur poet who had been working for several years as a nurse. In 1908 – the same year he composed *The Unanswered Question* – Ives married Harmony in a small ceremony in Hartford. Together, they planned a life full of quiet companionship and shared learning. In Harmony's own words: "...we must plan to have times for leisure of thought and we must try to read a lot... the best books – we can live with the noblest people that have lived this way." To a large extent, the newlyweds pursued this course successfully. In the years following their marriage, they became increasingly private and withdrawn, preferring the company of literature to that of friends. Household copies of favorite books became dog-eared and tattered as they were read and re-read.

The combination of all these factors – freedom from audience expectations, a relatively large amount of spare time afforded by financial security, the settled domesticity of married life, and his wife's abiding love of reading and learning – put Ives in a position to pursue the answers to the queries posed in *The Unanswered Question*. To a large extent, the answers he formulated would come from a group of thinkers called the transcendentalists. Ives pursued the study of this philosophy passionately after his marriage. So to fully understand the fourth symphony, we must first understand the transcendentalists.

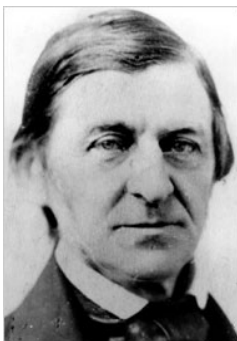
– transcendentalism –

“Nature, in its ministry to man, is not only the material, but is also the process and the result. All the parts incessantly work into each other’s hands for the profit of man. The wind sows the seed; the sun evaporates the sea; the wind blows the vapor to the field; the ice, on the other side of the planet, condenses rain on this; the rain feeds the plant; the plant feeds the animal; and thus the endless circulations of the divine charity nourish man.”

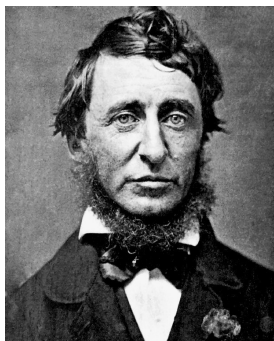
The above quote comes from an essay entitled *Nature*, which was published in 1836 by American author, lecturer, and former pastor Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82). In this short work, Emerson argued that true spirituality should be grounded in the veneration of nature. He challenged the idea that humans were over and above nature. Rather, Emerson argued, human beings were a unique but small part of a larger whole, whose self-developed institutions of politics and religion distracted them from the true meaning of existence - oneness with nature. In his words: “...if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars.”

Emerson's ideas, a peculiar American amalgamation of German Romantic philosophy and Eastern religious beliefs, laid the groundwork for a short-lived school of philosophy based in and around the town of Concord, Massachusetts. Collectively labeled the *transcendentalists*,⁴ intellectuals involved in this movement included Emerson, his protegee Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), author Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64, although he later broke with the movement), and Amos Bronson (1799-1888) and Louisa May Alcott (1832-88), a father/daughter duo of influential writers. Although their individual beliefs differed, all of the above figures shared certain broad values, which were eventually codified (kind of) with the creation of a “Transcendental Club” shortly after the publication of *Nature*:

- **Self-reliance.** Since human society is necessarily polluted by the corrupt influences of politics, religion, etc., only by isolating oneself can one discover purity. A perfect society can only be formed by individuals who have undergone such a process.
- **The infinite and eternal human soul.** The human soul, according to the transcendentalists, is everlasting and infinitely beautiful. The ego (the portion of the soul of which one is consciously aware) is slight and petty by comparison. However, humans are constantly mistaking the ego for their true selves. Human souls are linked in a way which cannot be entirely understood.
- **Nature as an expression of divinity.** Nature is a perfect manifestation of God's creative power. Man is a part of nature, and exists both to serve and be served by it.



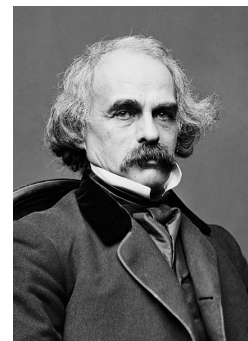
Emerson



Thoreau



L.M. Alcott



Hawthorne

⁴ “Transcendentalist,” like so many labels throughout history, was originally a derogatory term meant to imply that one was beyond reason or logic – in other words, crazy.

By the time Charles Ives reached his creative maturity in the first decade of the 20th Century, the transcendentalists were long out of style.⁵ However, Ives was as conservative in his philosophy as he was radical in his music, and found in their work the perfect ideological counterpoint to his unique mode of artistic expression. Transcendental writings would provide a basis for several Ives masterpieces, including the massive *Concord* piano sonata, which was destined to become one of his most enduring works. The sonata, which occupied its composer from 1911-15 (alongside the fourth symphony), has movements which depict Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, and Thoreau.

I. "Emerson"



Ives, Piano Sonata No. 2, *Concord, Mass. 1840-60*, I "Emerson" mm. 1-2

The influence of the transcendentalists on *Symphony No. 4* is more subtle and more varied, but no less crucial, than on the *Concord*. The symphony had its very genesis in Ives's Emersonian understanding of nature and its relationship with man. In April of 1910, Halley's comet was visible in the sky above New England, a phenomenon which Ives seems to have found inspiring. As biographer Jan Swafford points out, it is likely that the composer associated the apparition with a familiar protestant hymn (which was well-known to Ives – he had set the tune twice previously):

Watchmen, tell us of the night
 What its signs of promise are
 Trav'ler, o'er yon mountain's height,
 See that glory-beaming star.

With this association began the massive project, which would take Ives until 1924 to complete. During the compositional process, he drew heavily on the influence of the transcendentalists, cannibalized a bevy of previously completed pieces (including *The Unanswered Question* and the *Concord*), plumbed the depths of his formidable reservoir of hymns, folk tunes, and popular songs, and inserted conscious parallels to his own life and times. The symphony in its final form is arrayed in four diverse and eclectic movements:

- I. Prelude
- II. Comedy
- III. Fugue
- IV. Finale

5 As David C. Paul notes, the transcendentalists came back into vogue in the years after the first world war. This coincided fortuitously with Ives's somewhat desperate attempts to disseminate his music in 1920-22.

Each of these components has its own unique creative history and distinct pleasures. Taken together, they are even greater than the sum of their parts. But for our exploration of the symphony, it would perhaps be best to begin as Ives did: at the beginning.

- prelude -

The “Prelude” movement of the fourth was the first that Ives composed. Although the date of completion is difficult to determine, it was begun in 1910 and finished sometime before 1916. Unique among Ives's major orchestral works, the fourth symphony begins assertively, with a thundering sweep downwards in the piano and low strings:

This aggressive opening repeats, then dissolves quickly into a quiet murmur. After a pause, voices enter, a mixed chorus singing fragments of *Watchmen, Tell Us of the Night* in D-Major.⁶ The key is important. Although the prelude itself will stubbornly refuse to cadence (instead drifting through several tertiary keys, $D \rightarrow b \rightarrow G \rightarrow e$), the conclusion of the fourth movement will return dramatically to this key area. In hindsight, the relationship between the hymn and the low opening gesture is apparent – the first three compound beats of the hymn (subsections x , y and z) being presented in increasing inexact diminution, with subsection z inverted.

In its traditional incarnation, *Watchmen* ends with an affirmation: “Watchman, let thy wanderings cease / Hie thee to thy quiet home / Trav’ler, lo, the Prince of Peace / Lo, the Son of God is come.” Ives's version features lyrics which are presented out of order. Now, instead of ending with an affirmation, the hymn ends with a question and a command:

⁶ Here, a solo trumpet (George Ives's instrument) doubles the chorus, under whose parts Ives writes “Preferably without voices.” This is a clear autobiographical reference: as a boy, Charlie witnessed his father coax many an untalented choir through a hymn by leading them on his horn. Whether Ives meant for the enigmatic instructions to be observed is doubtful.

Watchmen, aught of joy or hope?
 Traveler, yes, it brings the day,
 Promised day of Israel,
 Dost thou see its beauteous ray?
 Oh! See

We, the listeners, are the travelers. But where are we traveling to? For what are we searching? The answer can be found in the distant shimmer of an ensemble made up of two violins, flute, and harp. This tiny group is entirely independent of the rest of the orchestra – in fact, Ives calls for them to be separated spatially from the stage. As the prelude proceeds, the quartet repeats material based on the hymn *Nearer, My God, to Thee*. This is an extension of the layering technique which Ives first used in *The Unanswered Question* – one clue among many that he intends this work to address the same philosophical material as that earlier miniature.

The "Distant Choir" [Text Added]

The musical score is for three instruments: Flute, Harp, and Violins, in 6/4 time. The Flute part begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The Harp part also begins with a rest, followed by a series of chords and a triplet of eighth notes. The Violins part is marked 'con sord.' and begins with a rest, followed by a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: (Still all my song shall be) for the Flute and Harp, and (Near - er, my God) for the Violins. The dynamics are *pp* for the Flute and Harp, and *ppp* for the Violins. A bracket labeled 'Motive B' spans the triplet in the Violins part.

The words to *Nearer, My God* (although they are not sung) also mention a wanderer. Examining them tells us, in broad terms, what Ives intends to seek with this symphony.

Though like the wanderer, the sun goes down,
 Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;
 Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to thee!
 Nearer, my God, to thee; nearer to thee!

At Yale, Ives listened impatiently as Horatio Parker explained the German symphonic orthodoxy – that an opening movement should present two themes, one aggressive, masculine, the other lyrical, feminine, contrasting in mood and tonality, but destined for reconciliation. Although he later disavowed Parker's teaching, Ives is (in his own way) toeing the line in the prelude movement of this work. However, the emphatic low descent and ethereal distant choir are more than mere themes – they are each imbued with weighty philosophical baggage. In his own description of the fourth, Ives wrote “The aesthetic program of the work is... the searching questions of What? and Why? which the spirit of man asks of life. This is particularly the sense of the prelude. The three succeeding movements are the diverse answers in which existence replies.” Motive A above (the seeker) and motive B (the sought) will reappear prominently in the symphony's finale, representing the triumphant conclusion to Ives's – and our – quest for answers.

PENITENCE AND PRAYER

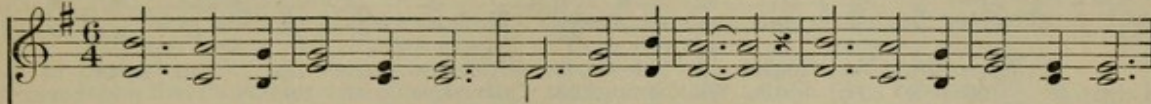
Nearer, My God, to Thee

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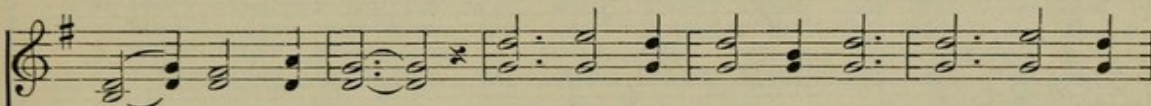
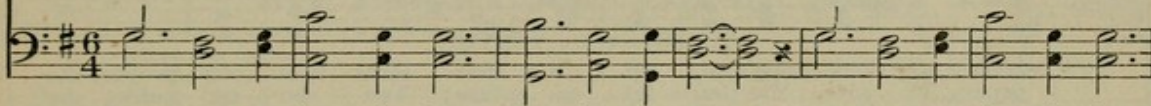
(BETHANY. 6, 4, 6, 4, 6, 6, 4)

SARAH F. ADAMS, 1841

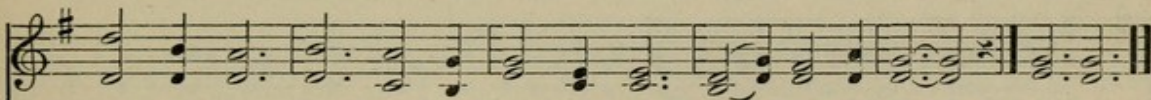
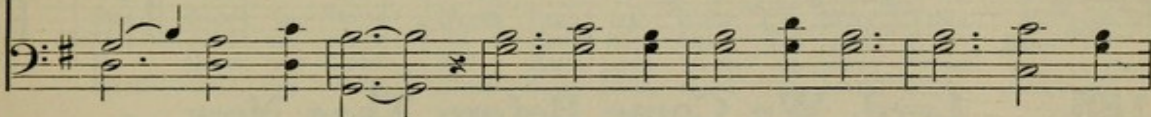
LOWELL MASON, 1856



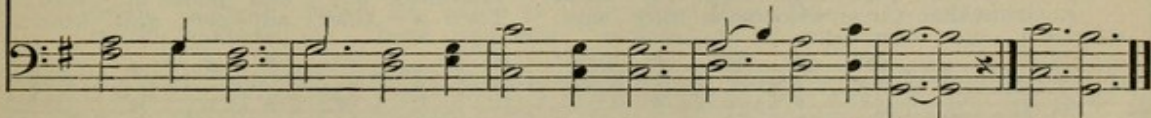
1. Near - er, my God, to thee, Near - er to thee! E'en tho' it be a cross
2. Though like the wan - der - er, The sun gone down, Darkness be o - ver me,
3. There let the way ap - pear Steps un - to heaven; All that thou sendest me
4. Then, with my wak - ing tho'ts Bright with thy praise, Out of my ston - y griefs,
5. Or if on joy - ful wing, Cleav - ing the sky, Sun, moon, and stars for-got,



That rais - eth me; Still all my song shall be, Near - er, my
 My rest a stone; Yet in my dreams I'd be Near - er, my
 In mer - cy given; An - gels to beck - on me Near - er, my
 Beth - el I'll raise; So by my woes to be Near - er, my
 Up - ward I fly, Still all my song shall be, Near - er, my



God, to thee, Near - er, my God, to thee, Near - er to thee! A-MEN.



PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS

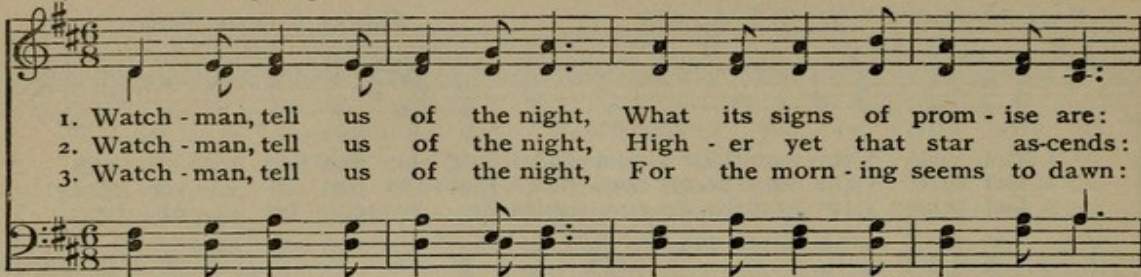
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Watchman, Tell Us of the Night

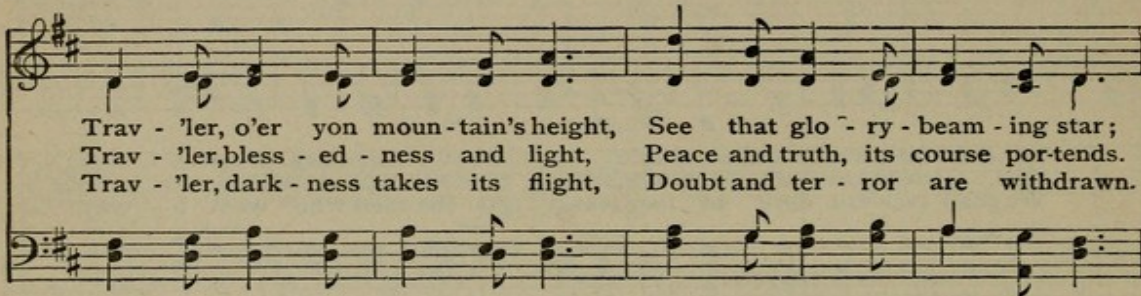
(WATCHMAN. 7, 7, 7, 7, D.)

JOHN BOWRING, 1825

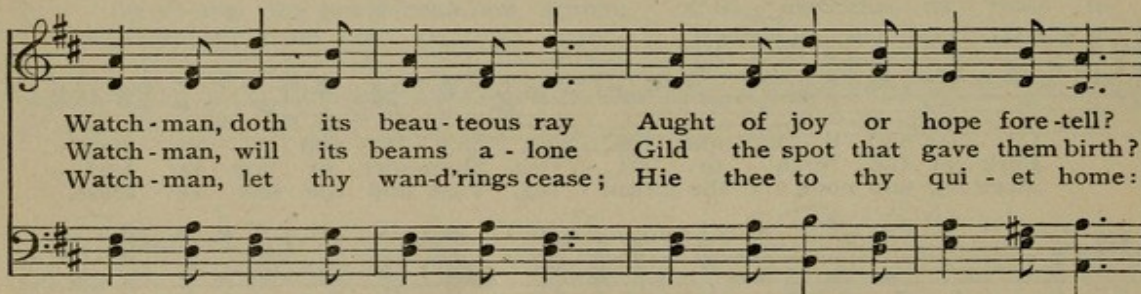
LOWELL MASON, 1830



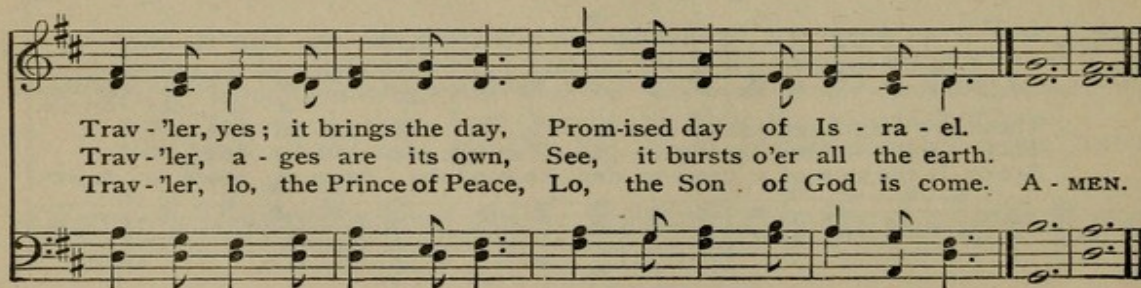
1. Watch - man, tell us of the night, What its signs of prom - ise are:
 2. Watch - man, tell us of the night, High - er yet that star as - cends:
 3. Watch - man, tell us of the night, For the morn - ing seems to dawn:



Trav - 'ler, o'er yon moun - tain's height, See that glo - ry - beam - ing star;
 Trav - 'ler, bless - ed - ness and light, Peace and truth, its course por - tends.
 Trav - 'ler, dark - ness takes its flight, Doubt and ter - ror are withdrawn.



Watch - man, doth its beau - teous ray Aught of joy or hope fore - tell?
 Watch - man, will its beams a - lone Gild the spot that gave them birth?
 Watch - man, let thy wan - d'ring cease; Hie thee to thy qui - et home:

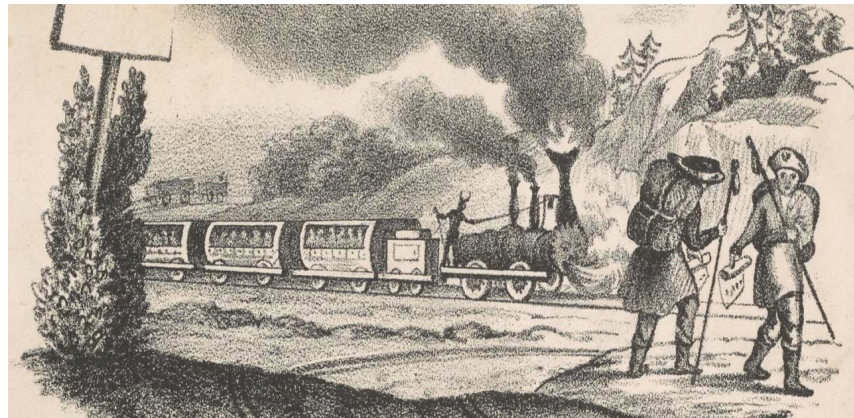


Trav - 'ler, yes; it brings the day, Prom - ised day of Is - ra - el.
 Trav - 'ler, a - ges are its own, See, it bursts o'er all the earth.
 Trav - 'ler, lo, the Prince of Peace, Lo, the Son of God is come. A - MEN.

- comedy -

The comedy movement of the fourth may have been the last major work Ives completed. Although Ives, late in life, claimed that the whole fourth symphony was finished in 1916, this was either a slip of memory or a deliberate fabrication. In truth, the comedy movement was probably not done until 1924. Musicologist Thomas Brodhead has made a detailed study of its somewhat confused genesis – originally, Ives intended the second movement of the symphony to be a piano concerto based on the “Hawthorne” movement of the *Concord*, written in 1913. Sometime later, Ives composed a thoroughly unplayable piano piece entitled *The Celestial Railroad* utilizing the same material, which he subsequently orchestrated in 1922-24. The movement's origins as a keyboard concerto remain evident in its highly virtuosic piano line.

The Celestial Railroad (and therefore, the second movement of the fourth symphony) is based on the Nathaniel Hawthorne short story of the same. Hawthorne's story is itself a nineteenth-century re-imagining of John Bunyan's 1678 religious allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Both literary works involve characters attempting to journey from the City of Destruction [earth] to the Celestial City [heaven]. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a protagonist named Christian makes the long journey on foot and is thus absolved of sin and welcomed into the Celestial City. In *The Celestial Railroad*, however, the nameless protagonist is encouraged by his friend Mr. Smooth-it-away to make the journey in a comfortable train, a decision which eventually leads to his rejection from heaven. The moral of Hawthorne's parable is clear: the easy living provided by modern technology makes it more difficult to achieve salvation.



An illustration based on Hawthorne's story. Sincere pilgrims make the trek to the Celestial City on foot, while the celestial rail-road carries those unwilling to work for redemption to their doom. This duality provided Ives with the formal structure of the comedy movement.

This message dovetails nicely with Ives's philosophical program in the fourth symphony. In the prelude movement, the “searching questions” were asked. In the comedy, society and the material world will answer. The basic form of the movement is a rondo (ABACADA), which juxtaposes the quiet solemnity of a pilgrims' hymn harmonized in quarter-tones with the unbelievable ruckus of modern existence – ragtime, marches, blaring horns, crashing cymbals (as Jan Swafford drily observes, the comedy might just be “the damndest racket ever to come out of an orchestra”). Again, Ives works here in layers: the pilgrims' hymn is always present, but can only be heard when the rest of the orchestra dies away.

The "Pilgrims' Hymn"

Violin I
Largo (only two)
div. *ppp*

Violin II
pp
div.

Viola
pp

square notes = quarter tones (1/4#)

Ives's counterpoint in the more active parts of this movement is a counterpoint of groups and gestures pursuing individual and uncoordinated ends to cacophonous effect. Groups of instruments function as small, independent ensembles playing in different keys, tempos and meters (Ives's metrical games typically require a second conductor to be present in performance). Although the ratios of these various parameters are carefully calculated to ensure overall synchronicity, from moment to moment no single key or meter is discernible.

Clarinet in Bb
Bassoons
Secondo Orchestra Piano
Trombones
Triangle
Light Gong
Indian Drum
Solo Piano
Violas
Violoncellos
Basses

(no faster, perhaps a little slower, about 104 = ♩)

(solo 1st time)

(usual stick sempre)

arco

div. pizz.

Ives, *Symphony No. 4*, II Rehearsal No. 14. Notice that three time signatures (4/4, 3/4 and 3/16) are in use simultaneously.

Even by Ivesian standards, the comedy is heavy with quotations of hymns, marches, etc. In all, over 30 different preexisting tunes have been located within the movement. The pilgrim's hymn itself is an ethereal arrangement of "The Sweet By-and-By" (a favorite of George Ives's). At one point, the orchestra belts out "Yankee Doodle" in six different keys at once. For sheer complexity, this music represents the utmost of which Ives (or anyone, perhaps) was capable in the first years of the 20th century. Yet for all of this brilliance, the frenetic sections of the comedy feel less intimate, less meaningful, than the quiet pilgrim's song. Like the train in Hawthorne's tale, these replies of the modern world to Ives's "searching questions" are full of sound and fury, yet ultimately mean very little. The question, at least for the moment, remains unanswered.

Table 1. General Correspondence between Ives's *The Celestial Railroad*, the "Hawthorne" Movement of the *Concord Sonata*, and the Second Movement of Symphony no. 4.

"Hawthorne"	CRR	IV2
p21, s3-p22, s2, b2	m1-6: Magical Frost Waves (the dream begins)	———— ^a
————	m7-14: Train bells	p1: solo piano
————	m15-20: Initial depot; "Martyn," "God Be With You"	r1-3: flute, solo piano, strings
————	m21-m36, b2: Train rolls into action (m35, b1-3)	r4-r6, bar 4 ^b , b2: high winds, solo piano, strings (r6, bar 2, b2-4: solo piano, strings)
("Emerson" movement, p13, s1, m3-s2, m1, b1)	————	r8, bar 1-3: solo piano
p24, s1, m2-s2, m3	————	r11, bar 1-2: trumpets, solo piano
p22, s2, b3-4	————	r11, bar 3, b4-bar 4, b1: bassoon, trumpet III, solo piano
p22, s2, b5-8	————	r11, bar 4, b2-bar 6, b2: pianos, violins
p22, s3	————	r12: primo piano, brass, solo piano
————	m36, b3-m42: "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!"	r13: high winds, pianos, tuba, basses
p23, s2, last beat-s3	m43-47: Throw Out the Life-Line, "Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-Eater"	r14, bar 1-16: clarinets, trombones, pianos
————	m48-60: "De Camptown Races"	r15, bar 1-4: clarinets, primo piano, solo piano, strings
p26, s4, b2-p27, s1, b6	m61-64	r15, bar 5-r16, bar 2, b2: primo piano, solo piano, strings
————	m65-75: "Old Black Joe"	r18-r21: pianos, brass, strings
p43, s3, m1-p45, s3, b2	m76-93: "Columbia," "The Beautiful River"	r22: solo piano, strings
————	m94-96: Mr. Smooth-it-away	r23, bar 1-2: solo piano
————	m97: Vanity Fair	r23, bar 8-r25: solo piano, trumpets, trombones, violin II, basses
————	m98-108	r26-27: flute, trombone (r27 only), solo piano, strings
p28, s1, b6-p29, s2	m109-23: "human-faith-melody"	r28, bar 1-2: flutes, clarinets
p29, s3, b1-6	m124-25	————
p29, s3, b7-s4, b4	m126-27	r29, bar 5, b2-r30, bar 1, b2: trumpet III, solo piano
p29, s4, b5-p30, s1, b1	m128-30: "human-faith-melody"	

Table 1, continued

<i>"Hawthorne"</i>	CRR	IV2
p30, s1, b3-4 (fragment)	m131-37: "Throw Out the Life-Line," Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (motive)	r30, bar 1, b3-bar 4: flutes, pianos, brass, strings
p31, s2-p33, s1, 1st ½ m	m138-45: Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (motive), "Throw Out the Life-Line"	r31, bar 3-r32: trumpets
p33, s1, 2nd ½ m-s2, b2	m146-48: "Martyn"	r33: solo piano, violas
—	m149-56	r34-35: solo piano
p34, s2, m2-s4, m4, b1	m157-66: Beulah Land; "Martyn"	r36-37: solo piano, violas
p34, s4, m4, b2-p35, s1, m3, b3	m167-73: Dream ends (interruption of reality)	r38: pianos, brass
p35, s1, m3, b4-s4, m2	m174-82: Fourth-of-July celebrations at Concord: "Country Band" March	r39-r40, bar 4: brass
p35, s4, m3-p36, s2, m2	m183-87	r41: solo piano, brass, violin I
p36, s2, m2	m188	r42, bar 1: solo piano
p36, s2, m3-s3, m1, b3	m189-90, b3	r42, bar 2-bar 3, b3: orchestral pianos, low brass, violin I, violas, basses
p36, s3, m1, b4-m4, b4	m190, b4-m193	r42, bar 3, b4-r43: second orchestral piano, low brass, solo piano, violin I, violas, basses
—	m194-201: Drum corps	r47: second orchestral piano, brass, solo piano, low strings
—	m202-3: "Yankee Doodle"	r46, bar 3-4: tutti
—	m204-206	r47: second orchestral piano, brass, solo piano, low strings

Brodhead, Thomas M. "Ives's Celestial Railroad and his Fourth Symphony." *American Music*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (Winter 1994). 392-93.

- fugue -

In a way, the fugue movement of the fourth symphony is the most shocking of all. After the deafening conclusion of the comedy, nothing could be more unexpected than a straightforward melody in, of all keys, C-Major. Although Ives later denied this,⁷ the fugue was originally composed in 1896, when Ives was at Yale, under the watchful eye of Horatio Parker. It was reincarnated as a movement in the first string quartet, then removed and re-orchestrated to serve as a symphonic movement.

Ives had little to say about this movement in his program notes, explaining only that the fugue was “an expression of the reaction of life into ritualism and formalism.” This does not fully explain the decision to include such an incongruous movement in the work. A true explanation can only be derived by examining the content of the fugue in relation to the work's larger program. In the prelude, Ives asked his questions – what is the meaning of life? Why are we here? In the comedy, the comforts of the world replied, and were found wanting. Now, with presentation of a simple fugue on a hymn tune, Ives (like so many) seems to be searching for answers in the realm of organized religion. From a musical perspective, the inclusion of the fugue in this piece is puzzling. But from a programmatic perspective, it makes perfect sense.

The subject of the fugue is the hymn “From Greenland's Icy Mountains.” Like *Watchmen* and *Nearer, My God, To Thee*, this song has a text which addresses wandering – in this case, the wandering of a missionary spreading god's word.

176 From Greenland's Icy Mountains.

BISHOP HEBER. "Missionary Hymn."—LOWELL MASON.

♩ = 90.

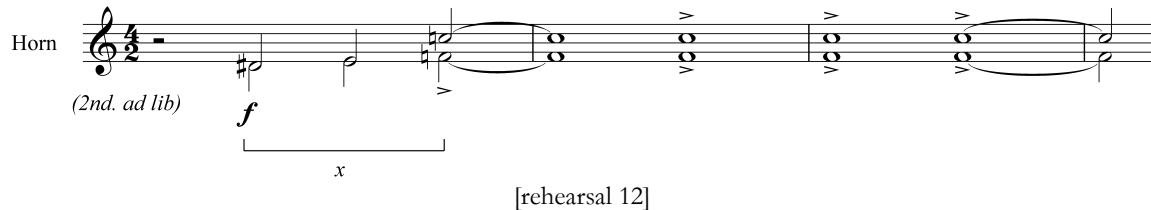
1. From Greenland's i - cy mount - ains, From In - dia's co - ral strand,
 2. What though the spi - cy breez - es Blow soft o'er Cey - lon's isle,
 3. Can we, whose souls are light - ed With wis - dom from on high,

Life-Time Hymns. R.R. McCabe and Co. Chicago, IL 1896. p. 176 [The portion of the hymn which is used as the fugue subject is indicated]

Ives radically restricts his orchestration in this movement, giving the music a sense of comfortable intimacy. Whereas the comedy featured an expanded brass section, a large percussion battery, and two pianos (one in quarter-tones), the fugue is scored primarily for strings alone. A handful of winds, horns, and a single trombone join in towards the end. The rest of the symphony's unusually large orchestra is silent. This is not a church hymn that evokes a vast cathedral, but rather one that conjures up a small-town house of worship – the sort that Ives attended all his life.

⁷ In his *Memos*, Ives actually claimed that the fugue was the last part of the symphony to be completed. This is not only a lie, but an obvious and inexplicable lie.

Technically speaking, the fugue is quite accomplished. Ives weaves together stretto passages with aplomb, basing them on both the main subject and (surprisingly) the hymn's refrain. Then, shockingly, just at the place where the fugue ended in its prior incarnations, Ives inserts something new: a forceful statement in the horns and double basses of motive A from the prelude, the theme which was associated at the outset with seeking answers, still asking, louder and more insistently than ever:



The implication is clear. Even the church, which was an important influence in Ives's life, cannot provide the answers to the existential questions posed in the prelude. By this point, the composer was too strongly an avowed transcendentalist to believe that the meaning of existence could be found in the neat “ritualism and formalism” of religion. In his own words, Ives described the church as “the path between God and man's spiritual part – a kind of formal causeway.” In other words, a way-station on the road between the earthly and the spiritual, but not the destination itself.

But if even religion cannot provide us with the answers we seek, what can? Ives gives us a clue in the final measures of the fugue, when a solo trombone enters for the only time in the movement, playing a phrase from the Christmas hymn “Joy to the World.” Like the outburst in the horns, this solo was not in the original fugue, but added by Ives in 1916.

No 234. Joy to the World. I. Watts. Second Tune. G. F. Handel.

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come; Let earth re-ceive her King; Let ev - 'ry heart pre-pare Him
2. Joy to the world! the Sav-ior reigns; Let men their songs em-ploy; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and
3. No more let sin and sor-row grow, Nor thorns in-fest the ground; He comes to make His bless-ings
4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the na-tions prove The glo - ries of His right-eous-

room, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.
plain, Re-peat the sound-ing joy, Re-peat the sound-ing joy, Re-peat, re-peat the sound-ing joy.
flow Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as the curse is found.
ness, And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love, And wonders, won-ders of His love.

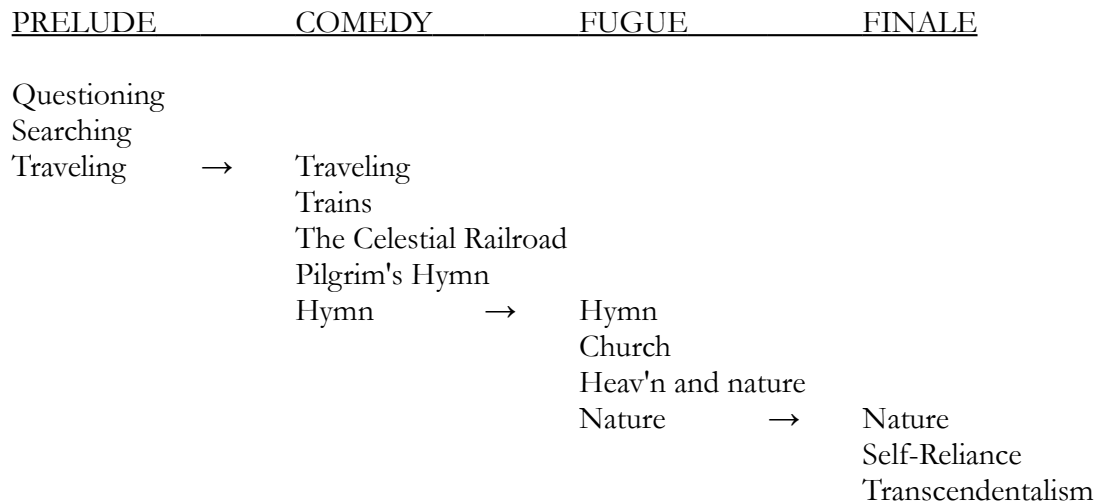
Sing.

And heav'n and na-ture sing, And heav'n and na-ture sing.

The Golden Sheaf No. 2. Advent Christian Publication Society. Boston, MA. 1916. p. 233 [Excerpt indicated provides the material for the trombone solo]

This excerpt is far from random. Melodically, it bears a passing resemblance to motive A. Harmonically, the phrase's conclusion on scale degree 4 allows Ives to conclude the fugue with a gentle IV-I "amen." But perhaps more telling than the music are the words which accompany it: "and heav'n and nature sing / and heav'n and nature sing." For Ives the transcendentalist, the small phrase must have had significant meaning. At a stroke, it combined God, nature and music – the three most important forces in his life. Ives's quotation is alerting listeners about what the content of the finale will be. Where modern culture and organized failed to provide adequate answers, nature – and self-reliance – and solitude – will succeed.

With this realization, the elegant dramatic arc of the symphony becomes clear. Each movement leads thematically into the movement that follows, like nesting dolls, creating a form which is musically eclectic but philosophically streamlined:



- finale -

The fourth movement of the symphony was composed either alongside or immediately after the prelude, sometime between 1910 and 1916. In Ives's words, it is "...an apotheosis of the preceding content, in terms that have something to do with the reality of existence and its religious experience."

At the heart of the movement is a slow, shuffling marching cadence performed by a group of percussionists who are independent from the rest of the orchestra. As they begin, the low strings again sound motive A. But the motive is changed: no longer assertive and demanding, it's now quieter, a third lower, like a sigh of despair from someone who has given up hope. The distant choir of violins, harp and flute (silent since the prelude) begin playing Motive B once again, shimmering like an answer that is just out of reach.

On the heels of this, the orchestra swells up, playing material derived from the previous movements. As the music progresses, fragments popular songs and church hymns compete for the listener's attention, each gradually growing louder in an attempt to drown out the others. The complexity here approaches that of the comedy, but the effect is different: far from humorous, the noise is overwhelming, inescapable. Meanwhile, the double basses solemnly bellow the opening phrase from *Nearer, My God to Thee* over and over again, like a mantra.

[Text Added]

a2 one pizz., one arco *Add by twos gradually*

Double Bass

(Still all my song shall be)

ppp

mm. 1-3

Just as it seems that the noise has become maddening, there is a sudden cut. Pursued by the multitude of voices representing the conflicting, inauthentic solutions of society and church, the seeker has finally escaped into solitude. Now that he is alone – no longer reliant on society, or religion, or anything else – the answer is clear at last. Since that final trumpet call faded into silence in 1908, Charles Ives had been searching. Now, perhaps as many as eight years later, this is the moment where he presents what he considered the solution to the unanswered question.

It is one of the most stunning climaxes in the symphonic repertoire. Suddenly, the music coalesces around a D-Major tonality (the same key that opened the prelude). Bells toll Motives A and B together – the seeker and the sought have, at long last, found reconciliation.

As varied forms of those two motives swirl through the orchestra, the chorus enters for the first time in half an hour, singing (without words) *Nearer, My God, To Thee*. It is a remarkable moment. When the hymn is finished, and the voices trail away into nothingness, it is not the expectant silence of a question left unanswered, but the comforting silence of a problem solved. A soft D-Major fog hangs in the aftermath of the symphony, and a single violin (the last remaining echo of the spatially separated ensemble) calls to mind *Nearer, My God's* closing words:

Or if on joyful wing, cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upwards I fly,
Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God, to Thee; Nearer to Thee!

- epilogue: the “Ives Legend” -

“The gods' great joke on Charles Ives,” writes Swafford in his biography, “is that while they granted him the energy and intelligence and talent to carry on a double life [meaning music and business], they bequeathed him a constitution that could only stand that pace for a little over half a life. He would not be allowed his dream of retiring full-time to music. His ruin was born to him along with his gifts.”

Ives's health had always been shaky. He had a heart attack in 1906, and another (much more severe) in 1918. But his most severe health problem was diabetes.⁸ Insulin treatment was not available for diabetics until the 1920's. By the time Ives's disease was treated, it had already weakened his heart, eaten away at his nervous system, and (to some degree, it seems) damaged his creative abilities. In 1926, Ives suffered a nervous breakdown. By the 1930s, he was bedridden much of the time. For the last quarter-century of his life, he composed practically nothing. The implausibility of his ideas from these years (musical, literary and political) are those of a man slowly making the journey from genius to crackpot.

From 1920-22, perhaps foreseeing this pending crisis, Ives took the desperate step of self-publishing several of his works (including the *Concord*) and mailing them, unannounced, to hundreds of musicians and composers around the world in a final bid for recognition. For the most part, those who received these strange scores were just puzzled. But a few brave souls were curious enough to investigate further, which led to the formation of a small cadre of Ives enthusiasts in the ensuing decade. Many of these supporters (Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Nicholas Slonimsky, and others) were arch-modernists, whose music and lifestyles Ives would not necessarily have liked. But they worked tirelessly on his behalf, and in return, he bankrolled many of their artistic endeavors.



Henry Cowell with Ives, 1942

Thanks to the efforts of these advocates, Ives found a small measure of fame late in life, including a Pulitzer Prize in 1947. But thanks to his fragile health and the lamentable condition of

⁸ Probably also the disease that killed George Ives.

his scores, most of his most important compositions (including the fourth symphony⁹) were never premiered during his lifetime. Ives went to his grave in 1954 without ever hearing the grand apotheosis of the fourth movement, finished almost four decades earlier.

This led to an unusual situation. Ives's name and general history became well-known, even as his music (unheard by many) struggled to gain a toehold in the repertoire. A sort of mystical reputation – changeable in some ways, consistent in other ways – was conferred upon Ives posthumously, an “Ives Legend” which persists to a degree even today. With the music out of the picture, the public felt free to twist the man to suit their ends. The basic tenets of the “Ives Legend” are:

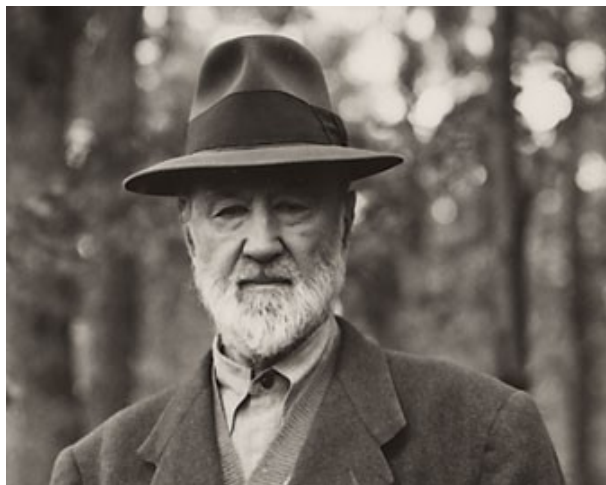
- **Ives the modernist.** True, to an extent. Certainly, Ives was not afraid to embrace modern techniques and harmonies. But one essential trait for any modernist is a self-conscious striving towards the new. In this sense, Ives is anything but modern. Most of his compositions are reflective or nostalgic in subject matter.
- **Ives the quintessential American, the “self-made man,” the hermetic genius.** Only partially true. Certainly Ives was an iconoclastic artist, and this was partially the result of his isolation. But this existence was as much thrust on him as chosen by him – after all, it was the social pressures of his upbringing which ultimately pushed him away from the life of a professional musician.
- **Ives the populist/socialist.** Hard as it is to believe, Ives's employment of folk music quotations made him an attractive artistic voice to the communist left (and even the Soviet authorities!) during the Cold War years. Ives was, in fact, quite liberal (his proposed 20th amendment to the constitution would have allowed for the people to submit legislation to congress). But it's doubtful that he would have approved of this adoption of his music.
- **Ives the misogynist.** Perhaps haunted by memories of the “nice ladies” of Dansbury, Ives often used sexist and unpleasant language in describing his music. For him, use of dissonance was an expression of masculinity.¹⁰ This ugly language did not, by and large, seep into his behavior (and his marriage was long, happy, and peaceful). But what is undeniable is that Ives was homophobic. When Henry Cowell was arrested for homosexual activity, Ives broke off contact with his friend suddenly and completely. Only when Cowell became engaged, years later, did they resume communication.
- **Ives the Amateur.** Mostly untrue. Although he wrote music in his spare time, Ives could have made a living as a musician at any point until the deterioration of his health. Even as an old man, he would occasionally entertain guests by performing Bach fugues – with each voice in a different key.

9 Only the comedy and fugue movements were performed while Ives was alive.

10 There may have been another reason for this need to prove his masculinity. A common side effect of untreated diabetes is impotence. Whether Ives was impotent is unknown, but he and Harmony had no children by birth (they did adopt a daughter).

- study questions -

- 1) When was *The Unanswered Question* composed? What is novel about the construction of this piece? How does its program relate to that of the fourth symphony?
- 2) What are the basic tenets of transcendentalism? Which transcendental thinkers most influenced Ives?
- 3) What two hymns are most prominent in the prelude? What do they represent?
- 4) How does the opening motive (Motive A) relate to the program of the symphony? How was this motive derived? At what places in the symphony does it return, and how is it transformed?
- 5) What is the form of the comedy? What is the literary inspiration for this form?
- 6) What was the compositional history of the comedy?
- 7) What hymn does Ives use as the fugue subject? What other hymn is quoted in the fugue? Why is this quotation important to the program of the symphony?
- 8) How does Ives create a dramatic arc in this symphony?
- 9) Who was George Ives? Who was Horatio Parker? What were their influences on this work?
- 10) What are some aspects of the “Ives Legend?” To what extent are they true/untrue?



Ives near the end of his life. He grew his trademark beard after suffering a diabetes-induced stroke which made it difficult to shave.