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Bölcsészettudományi Kar

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Az amerikai filozófia Charles Ives zenéjében

American Philosophy in the Music of Charles Ives

Témavezető:
Soto Amy Nicole

Készítette:
Ittzés Péter
Anglisztika alapszak
Angol szakirány

Table of Contents

Abstract

The life and music of American composer Charles E. Ives has been the subject of much discussion throughout the latter half of the twentieth century and continues today. With that said, his contributions to American and by implication Western culture are often overlooked outside of the United States, and certain circles of connoisseurs. The aim of this thesis is to shed light on the intriguing connection between Ives's music and American Transcendentalist philosophy in a way which requires only very basic knowledge of music theory and analysis. I will briefly discuss Ives's life and the historical context in which he lived, then also introduce the school of Transcendentalism, of which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were the most emblematic. The core of the thesis consists of an analysis based on a number of pieces by Ives in the context of Transcendentalist philosophy including the *Concord Sonata*, the *Fourth Symphony* and *Three Places in New England*. The analysis will focus on whether Ives's works are representative of Transcendentalism, and how two concepts, *musical quotation and allusion* and *simultaneity of independent events* work together in his music to record a *universal human experience*. The work of Cazden (1951) and Frank (1952) regarding realism in music and Scruton (1971) on representation will provide as the basis on which the analysis rests. I will also allude to the topic of where Ives may be placed within an American cultural context, and the Western musical canon.

Introduction

"Charles Ives, American Composer" was the title of an obituary written by Everett Helm in *The Musical Times*, shortly after Ives's death in 1954 (356). Indeed, it would be difficult to find another pair of words that would describe Charles Ives so well – some may even consider him "the" American composer. Ives's life and career, however unusual they were, trace out an important line on the canvas of turn-of-the-century and early twentieth century America. In his obituary, Helm writes of Ives: "Living in the musical isolation of a small New England town he dreamed dreams of new sounds, new rhythms and new harmonic relationships which to his contemporaries must have appeared sheer lunacy and are even today astonishing for the originality and boldness of their conception" (356). The most perplexing aspect of the Ives phenomenon is indeed the utter unlikeliness of the path he has taken – it is not the career of a successful composer in the slightest, yet in near-complete isolation, with no orchestra to perform or little to no audience to hear his works until late in his life, he achieved more than enough to be admitted into the pantheon of American music.[1]

This thesis is concerned with the connection of the music – or indeed, the whole person – of Charles Ives with the nineteenth century Transcendentalist philosophy. The main question is whether Ives succeeds in representing the abstract ideas of Transcendentalism through the medium of music. In order to arrive at a meaningful conclusion, a framework of representation in music will be later introduced, based on Cazden (1951), Frank (1952), and Scruton (1971), followed by an analysis of a number of the composer's works such as the "Concord Sonata", the "Fourth Symphony", and the "Unanswered Question". Alongside analysing his music, we will also touch upon the question of what makes Ives quintessentially American even with all his eccentricities and unique experiences – and what made him, arguably an exemplary follower of Transcendentalist ideals, in Emersonian terms, "Man Thinking".

Just as much as his music, the very person of Charles Ives is pervaded with contradictions. Wealthy New Englander and countercultural rebel, successful businessman and musical innovator, he encompassed a wide range of distinct characteristics. The aim of the following section is to explore Ives's life and historical-cultural context, to provide a background to our later discussion of his American identity and connections to Transcendentalism. Ives was born in Danbury, Connecticut in 1874, a town that, at the time still more-or-less retained all the traditional qualities that characterized New England small-town life. Town meetings, church services, Civil War memorial events dominated the everyday life of residents. The Yankee Protestant ideals of social equality, moral duty and civic participation seemed to be kept alive to an extent. However, the late nineteenth century brought the emergence of "another Danbury" – one dominated by mechanized industry (especially hat-making) and the newcomers (such as Southern, Central and Eastern European immigrants) that would work in such industry.[2] The clash between old and new would be the chief defining feature of the road into the new century. Despite the growing differences, Danbury was for a long time thought to be among most equal and democratic towns in existence.[3] There were no large financial gaps, and local people were reportedly well-educated, no matter their profession (Budiansky 32-33).

This was then the place where Charles spent his childhood, first and foremost under the guidance and influence of his father, George Edward Ives. George, leader of a local marching band, oversaw the boy's first encounters with music, and his unusual and open-minded take on musical education must be credited for many of Charles's later interests. While he taught his son the fundamentals of classical German harmony and counterpoint, he also encouraged him to experiment with non-traditional composition techniques such as polytonality[4], and microtonality,[5] for example. However, many of the early influences on Charles were wholly unintentional; the extraordinary ears and mind of the child seem to have picked up on aural

experiences that at the time would not have been of interest to any serious composer: the out-of-tune church organ, with the choir lagging behind, or the sound of two marching bands passing each other, playing different tunes (Helm 357). He later incorporated such experiences into many of his works. The actual melodies themselves also became a chief characteristic of his works: there is scarcely any piece by Ives that does not in some way include a quotation of a patriotic Civil War march, a folksy Stephen Foster song, or a Protestant hymn tune (Marshall 45). Ives himself was no stranger to church services – as early as 1889, he was employed as an organist at the Danbury Baptist Church (Budiansky 57). He must have been quite the virtuoso on the instrument, as attested by his "Variations on 'America'", a piece of extraordinary difficulty. Written in 1891 (at the age of sixteen), while it follows the contemporaneous trend of showpiece variations on patriotic songs, it quickly evolves to include daring harmonic and rhythmic turns, along with two polytonal interludes, which Ives usually left out of performances to avoid ridicule (59).[6]

While George Ives encouraged his son's musical education, he knew from his own experience that making a living from teaching and performing music is difficult, to say the least. Led by this practical conviction, he clearly set out the path of success before his son: Yale. However, admission into Yale was no small challenge, therefore Ives, at the time nineteen, had to be thoroughly prepared. George sent his son to New Haven in 1893 to study at Hopkins Grammar School, an institution with an impressive history, whose purpose was to prepare students for the Yale entrance examination (60). In 1894, he attended a performance of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* in New York, but he was not particularly impressed (62).[7] Amidst serious doubts about whether he would be able to pass the Yale entrance exam in 1894, Ives's morale and standing was boosted by the offer of a position as an organist at the Central Episcopal Church of New Haven. In September, he was admitted into Yale which marked the beginning of a new chapter in his life (64).

At the time, the education system at Yale was at a point of transient uncertainty (65). New economic, technological and social developments required traditional colleges to adapt to the needs of a new century. Some institutions, including Yale, were slower in taking up the pace. The years around 1900 are also often quoted to be the academic low point of Yale (67). Nevertheless, the university had a high prestige, and Yale graduates had every reason to look forward to a bright career. The concept of a "major" did not exist yet: in the first two years, all students shared a common curriculum of subjects like Greek, Latin, English and geometry (65). Ives was adamant on continuing his music education, and fortunately for him, Yale had recently yielded (partially) to modernity, and introduced elective classes in music history, music theory, and composition (66). Ives started taking composition classes in his junior year with a quite conservative teacher, Horatio W. Parker. His musical output from this period, at least what was not lost, includes mostly marches and songs written for college events – often, these were frivolous and bawdy balls, or plays organized by fraternities. Several of the short songs have made it into his volume *114 Songs* (self-published in 1922), and display, while remaining in the established territory of musical idioms, the humour, and experimenting spirit that would later characterize his mature works (74). Musical memory and association became a significant theme in his music.

Graduating Yale after four years, Ives moved to New York. To supplement his income as an organist, he took on a job at the Raymond & Co life insurance agency, where he met his future business partner, Julian Myrick (90). The eighteen-nineties also saw Ives composing the first few pieces in his series of choral works on the text of psalms. In 1900 he became organist and choirmaster at the Central Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which gave him an opportunity to try out his new ideas in practice. "Psalm 67", "Psalm 100", "Psalm 135" and the first of his "Three Harvest Home Chorales", all works teeming with unconventional rhythms and polytonality, were written and performed around this period (100). In 1902 he made his last

attempt at writing “sellable” music: his conventional cantata “The Celestial Country”, modelled after Horatio W. Parker’s “Hora Novissima”, was premiered at the Central Presbyterian Church and was met with little praise. Ives realized he had no future in professional music and decided to quit his job at the church and reserve music to his private sphere (97).

1902 and 1926 mark roughly the beginning and end of Ives’s most prolific and inspired period (103). Retiring as an organist, he spent much of this time in as complete an isolation as his family and business life allowed, troubled by increasingly serious symptoms that later were identified to be caused by diabetes (181). His interaction with the musical life of the country was limited to generous (but discreet) donations to artists just as obscure as himself, and the occasional attempt to gain some recognition – none of which bore any fruit until the 1920s. The lack of audience, however, enabled Ives to follow his own ears only, and write music unlike nearly anything written before (105). His works, while unique in many ways, also had similarities to the new music of Scriabin, Stravinsky, Bartók and Schoenberg – remarkably, he probably had not heard their music before the early twenties, yet he employed similar techniques and ideas even before his contemporaries.[8] The conception of his most famous and emblematic pieces also dates to this period.

Even though his start in the life insurance business was rough, Ives quickly found his calling. He became a capable trainer of insurance agents and had remarkably clear ideas about what he considered life insurance to be: a “self-evident moral good for society” (Budiansky 104). During sweeping changes that were changing the insurance scheme, Ives was able to establish his own insurance agency with his colleague Julian Myrick, called Ives & Co, later Ives & Myrick (139). Guided by the vision of Ives, who had a half-idealistic, half-practical approach to life insurance, the business rapidly grew during the 1910s (164). Ives was the first to develop and utilize a rigorous process of calculating life insurance rates based on income age and life expectancy (167). He successfully combined this scientific factuality with ideas from

Transcendentalism and Protestant thought which emphasized equality and the value of protecting family, and the message resonated extraordinarily well. Ives & Myrick was also among the pioneers of also offering insurance to businesses, not only individuals and families (168). During his years in the insurance industry, Ives has accumulated a fortune that put him well into the top thirty thousand earners in the United States at that time (164). His considerable wealth allowed him to fund his own works and donate to nearly every good cause he encountered (16). Indeed, he cannot be accused of frugality in this respect: he gave money away to aid wartime humanitarian efforts and he also loyally supported his friends – Henry Cowell, for example, a significant figure of the next generation of modernist American composers, launched and maintained his periodical "New Music" chiefly on Ives's regular contributions (209). Ives preferred to stay in the background, or anonymous in his contributions, and sometimes modestly downplayed his part: when he received the Pulitzer Prize for his "Third Symphony" in 1947, he gave away 250 dollars to three of his friends, claiming to each of them that it was half of the five hundred-dollar prize (16). Prizes themselves were never important to him, as he thought them to be infantile and unnecessary (10). Privately, however, he kept record of articles, concert programmes and the like, which included all his successes and failures (4). During most of his life Ives had indeed become, "the rarest of people: a *practicing* idealist" (15). Although this his idealism bordered on madness when it came to matters of politics and the musical life of the United States – Ives, normally a friendly if reclusive person, could cause many awkward moments by going on rants about the "sissies" and "old ladies" dominating music or giving the power back to the people (8). Even though quite patriotic, he was never a nationalist and has always made that clear when people pointed out how "American" he was (228). His idea of Americanness was inseparable from the spirit of hard-working Puritans and thoughtful Transcendentalists.

In the early twenties, Ives's "splendid isolation" began to subside, as he began to establish a small circle of friends and followers, and also attended concerts where new music was played (Budiansky 198). The term "cult following" could not be more apt, as many of Ives's new acquaintances adhered to a variety of spiritual beliefs that ranged from the peculiar to the shockingly surreal (197).[9] They shared an interest in music they perceived to be "otherworldly" or "spiritual", and this category consisted of many avantgarde and modernist works. Ives was not fond of this kind of spiritualism, but his goal to channel Transcendentalism in his music made him a good candidate for a "prophet" – one to pit against serialist[10] composer Arnold Schoenberg, whose music was considered "unnatural" or even "evil" by the group. Ives likely did not mind that their beliefs and reasons did not match, but rather enjoyed the first experiences of being appreciated in a long time, even if he seldom admitted having any dreams of fame. Among Ives's new acquaintances, Henry Cowell and Nicolas Slonimsky stand out, the latter being the first conductor to put Ives's works on his repertoire. With Henry Cowell, Ives was on good terms until 1936, when Cowell was arrested for committing sodomy with an underaged boy, which Ives, in his reserved conservatism, could not stomach, and virtually suspended communication with Cowell (238). Nevertheless, Cowell remained one of his most loyal proponents, and wrote the first definitive biography of Ives, published in 1955 (253). Later devotees of Ives include Bernard Herrmann, the renowned composer of film music, and Aaron Copland, another American composer who later rose to fame (225-226). While he may have gained some recognition, his health was rapidly deteriorating due to diabetes, and he also had problems with composing. One day in the fall of 1926, he came down from his studio upstairs at their flat in New York in tears and told his wife that he could not compose anymore – nothing sounded right (205). Indeed, from this point on, most of his work was limited to revising pieces and preparing them for publication.

By the time of his death in 1954, the music of Charles Ives had become much more appreciated in the United States and even abroad. American musicians, conductors, and composers, such as Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein were essential in bringing Ives's music to a wider audience. Composer Arnold Schoenberg wrote the following note around 1945:

> There is a great Man living in this Country – a composer. He has solved the problem of how to preserve one's self and to learn. He responds to negligence by contempt. He is not forced to accept praise or blame. His name is Ives (qtd. in Watson 157).

Transcendentalism in New England

The philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) may be summarized in the following twenty words: self-reliance, culture, intellectual and moral independence, the divinity of nature and man, the necessity of labour, and high ideals (Emerson 2). Many of these concepts have arguably shaped American thinking from the early nineteenth century onwards to an extent unmatched by any other school of thought – the ideas of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and others have made their way into the very core of American identity. In the following short section, some general ideas of Transcendentalism will be introduced, however, specific connections to Ives's music will be discussed further in the subsequent section of the paper.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, poet, writer and Unitarian minister, is the one of the Transcendentalists whose influence on Ives was perhaps the largest. Born in Boston in 1803, he grew up in a highly cultured, rather progressive environment, which was fuelled by the growth of the city's economy and trade (McClure Mudge 4). The atmosphere of the Revolution and War of Independence was still lingering over Boston.[11] Emerson was born into a religious family: his father, William Emerson was a minister at the most prominent Congregational church in the city (7). Even though politically conservative, William was part of a liberal branch

of the church which focused on “reason and active virtue” (7). The death of his father meant that he not only experienced poverty first-hand (which influenced his later views), but he also became more open to the ideas of his free-thinking aunt, and father-substitute, Mary Moody Emerson (15). Emerson went on study at Harvard College in accordance with family tradition, and this is where his philosophical studies really began (23). At first unsure of what profession to choose, Emerson started out as a schoolteacher, but decided to enter Harvard’s Divinity School in 1825 (46). He was heavily influenced by European Romanticism in this period and adopted a mindset of “feelings over reason” (50). He gave sermons as a licensed preacher until the early 1930s, which already foreshadowed his interest in self-reliance, morality, divinity in the natural world, and the individual’s search for the truth (55). After taking a Grand Tour of Europe, he returned and began a career as a lecturer, which ultimately made him famous (70). Moving from Boston to Concord, he finished his first book, *Nature* (77). Published in 1836, the essay exhibits a pantheistic worldview, and focuses on the central conception of “external Nature as an incarnation of the Divine Mind” (Emerson 3). Next year, he delivered a lecture before the Phi Beta Kappa Society in Cambridge, entitled *Man Thinking, or the American Scholar*, which imagines the ideal scholar, who does not learn from old books, but knows how to find their own truth in nature and actions (Emerson 23).

In 1837, Emerson met young Harvard student and Concord resident Henry David Thoreau, who was interested in the older philosopher’s work (McClure Mudge 130). Under Emerson’s mentoring, he developed his own, in some ways more radical ideas – he was rather anti-authority and questioned the ethical legitimacy of private property (131). Thoreau’s most famous work *Walden* (1854) is an account of his two-year experiment of living on his own close to nature. *Walden* is many things: a diary, the collection of a naturalist’s observations, a “tour guide”, and a philosophical treatise. Based only on *Walden*, one may think that Thoreau was more down-to-earth than Emerson, but some of his other works indicate that he saw himself

as a prophet, and attempted to create scripture to supplement his claim: his last manuscript, *Wild Fruits* (Willsky 625-626).

Proper treatment of our topic requires an overview of the attitude of Transcendentalists towards music. Fortunately, there is no need to rely on only the writings of Emerson or Thoreau, since almost all of the Transcendentalist periodicals in the first half of the nineteenth century include articles about the subject (Lowens 71). This, of course, also indicates that music played an important role in Transcendentalism. It has to be noted, nevertheless, that these journals differed a lot in the type, style and content of the articles they included (72). Journals included concert reviews and critiques, the use of music in church services or accounts of the lives of great composers, such as the then recently passed Beethoven. While most of these journals also contain occasional appearances of deeper Transcendentalist insight, probably the only person to extensively deal with music from a Transcendentalist perspective was John Sullivan Dwight (75). Dwight's central proposition was that "if words were to be regarded as the language of the thought, then music must be regarded as the language of feeling" (75). He thought that some things, which may be inexpressible via words, can be given form through the medium of music. Moreover, he regarded music as an essential means of awakening a sense of unity between different individuals and of creating a common human experience (75). As we will see later, even though there is no telling whether Ives was familiar with Dwight's theories, this universal quality of music was of utmost importance to him.

Emerson calls music "the poor man's Parnassus" (qtd. in Watson 5),[12] which should not be taken as a derogatory statement, but as recognition of the universal accessibility and inclusiveness of music. Anyone can enjoy and share musical experiences, if not within the walls of sophisticated concert hall, then among the songbirds in the woods, or in the church pew. It has been mentioned before, and will be discussed later, that this accessibility was the quality of music Charles Ives cherished the most and wanted to preserve and bring forward in an age

when, Ives thought, snobbery and superficial refinement were threatening it. While John Sullivan Dwight firmly stood by the refined aesthetic qualities of composers such as Handel, Mozart and Beethoven, Ives chose to follow a different path, one where even an out-of-tune village singer may be a possessor of the divine. Democratic, honest, natural: these were the ideals Ives seemed to value the most from Transcendentalism, and the ones he championed in his music throughout his life.

Representation in music

Essays before a Sonata is a short book written to accompany the first edition of Ives's monumental work the "Piano Sonata No. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840-60", first published in 1920. The "dedication" of the book speaks volumes about Ives's humour: "These prefatory essays were written by the composer for those who can't stand his music – and the music to those who can't stand his essays; to those who can't stand either, the whole is respectfully dedicated" (1). It is clear he had no illusions about his reputation, but he was always unapologetic about his artistic endeavours. The book consists of six essays, written in a vaguely Emersonian, if hard to follow style. Ives's philosophical musings follow the structure of the sonata itself: apart from the first and last essays, which are a prologue and an epilogue respectively, they bear the same titles as the four movements of the piece: *Emerson*, *Hawthorne*, *The Alcotts*, and *Thoreau*. According to the brief preface, the music and the text together (which were originally intended to be published in a single volume) are an "attempt to present [one person's] impression of the spirit of transcendentalism" (1). The essays have been criticised (and justifiably so) for their uneven quality, vague and sometimes incoherent style, and the fact that they do not explain the music itself at all, even though that was supposedly the reason they were written and published in the first place (Budiansky 181).

The words that are most relevant to this paper, and are the starting point of the following main discussion, are found in the very first paragraph of the first essay:

> How far is anyone justified, be he an authority or a layman, in expressing or trying to express in terms of music (in sounds, if you like) the value of anything, material, moral, intellectual, or spiritual, which is usually expressed in terms other than music? How far afield can music go and keep honest as well as reasonable or artistic? (3)

The main framework that is utilized in this thesis relies on the idea of representation in music. Ives's initial question echoes our first one: can music actually represent anything, and if so, how?

Scruton (1971) argues that music cannot be representational since knowledge of the object a piece of music is supposed to represent is not essential to the understanding of that particular piece of music (286). However, others such as Cazden (1951), and Frank (1952) criticize belief in the abstractness of music, and rely on a different sense of the concept, formulating it chiefly using words like imitation and reference, rather than representation. According to Cazden (1951), the connection between music and reality may be characterised in three ways: naturalism, pictorialism, and realism (135). Naturalism refers to the "imitation of sounds that exist in nature – notably, Cazden does not subscribe to a narrow definition of nature and includes sounds made by humans (135). Naturalism is limited because it has an "inevitable effect of humour" due to the imperfection of the imitation, and if, as in some twentieth century and contemporary works, the actual sounds themselves are used, this humorous effect is even more prominent (136-137). Pictorialism is one level of abstraction further than naturalism; it relies on the "intervention of intellectual process", which makes the listener able to connect indirectly related ideas to music. A typical example would be the connection of descending pitch, and the physical event of falling down. However, Cazden also groups more abstract associations and connections (i.e. symbols) under the umbrella of pictorialism. Realism is an odd-one-out, as it is described as an inherent feature of all music: "Realism in music is the totality of concrete reference to the common experience of human

beings as embodied in all the formal elements of musical art" (150). Therefore, realism, according to Cazden is tied to a significantly different concept of representation. Frank (1952) refines Cazden's division further by differentiating between pictorialism and symbolism, as well as redefining realism according to Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of basic attitudes (58). He also criticizes Cazden's use of the word "naturalism", since it does not exclude man-made sounds (3). However, no alternative is offered, therefore it is the term that will be used here. Unlike Cazden, Frank only uses the word "pictorialism" to denote a reference to visual objects (e.g. a melodic line similar to some physical shape) and proposes the term "symbolism" for reference to abstracts (4). A common example of symbolism is Wagner's use of the compositional technique called "leitmotif", notably in the Ring cycle. Symbols like the recurring motifs Wagner uses to represent persons, feelings, or ideas, are largely arbitrary, however, the substantial length of the four operas enable an attentive audience to begin comprehending the symbols to an extent, even without being explicitly introduced to them in advance. It is not without merit to dispute the potential of such symbolism in representation, as Cazden does, however, as we will not typically find Wagnerian composition in the case of Ives, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these matters (140). Cazden mentions an even more limited type of "momentary symbol", which, unlike most of Wagner's leitmotifs, has no opportunity to make itself known purely through the music, and, were it not for the composer's explicit remarks (if any), it would remain a "private matter" (140). As it has been mentioned, Ives's own writings, including his *Essays before a Sonata,* while often rather interesting, are ot easy to utilize in writing about his music because of their fragmented and unclear nature, but what little we have will work to our advantage later.

We set out to define representation in music, and what it entails, but the previous discussion leaves more questions unanswered than answered. It is clear that this is a complex topic, therefore it is in our best interest to adopt a rather simplified approach for the time being.

The concepts presented in more detail above, namely naturalism, pictorialism, symbolism, and realism, will be treated as forms of representation of reality in music. Cazden's and Frank's approach to realism which reframes it as a basic attitude inherent in music will prove to be useful in describing Ives's music, and the other three concepts, abundant in Ives's music, will often be treated as devices in the service of realism.

Representing Transcendentalism: from the "Concord Sonata" to the "Fourth Symphony"

While it is fruitful to subject some pieces to closer analysis, an overview of some of Ives's oeuvre may be better to start with. A stark first impression is that of the titles he gave to his works. The nineteenth century has seen the rise of programmatic music: pieces that attempt to represent extramusical concepts. Accordingly, titles that simply indicated form, instrumentation, or purpose were slowly overshadowed by ones that aimed to evoke entire scenes and stories (Johnson 189). However, while Ives may have been influenced by musical Romanticism,[13] and its flagship the symphonic poem, his output includes quite unexpected pieces such as "Some South-Paw Pitching", which was inspired by a baseball game he saw, and "The Yale-Princeton Football Game", similarly commemorating significant sports event. Even his more tamely titled pieces such as "Central Park in the Dark" offer a completely distinct view from that of Romanticism, the appearance of the noises of a modern city, for example. The number of titles of Ives that reference American holidays, places or sports make it clear that he was strongly tied to his homeland in this respect. "New England Holidays Symphony" (a group of four standalone pieces: "Washington's Birthday", "Decoration Day", "The Fourth of July" and "Thanksgiving Day"), "Three Places in New England", the "Concord Sonata", and others. The volume *114 Songs* includes many instances of quintessentially American themes: "Charlie Rutlage" is a cowboy song, "Nov. 2, 1920" is a reflection to a presidential election, and "Thoreau" is a short (slightly abridged) excerpt from *Walden* set to music. The lyrics of "Walt

Whitman" and "Duty" are from Whitman and Emerson, respectively. A variety of religious-themed and war songs also appear. Among the several experimental art songs, there are a number of light-hearted little pieces written in a popular style. It is clear from Ives's end notes that he did not take these songs seriously (260). *114 Songs* gives a very good overview of the themes Ives was interested in rendering in music. It is not easy to categorize his works, because the boundaries of those categories would be rather blurry. Instead, I intend to make the claim that not only are there some universal characteristics of Ives's music that apply to most of his works, but also that many of these features are rooted in his Transcendentalist worldview. The chief problem is, of course, to find a way to shed light on these common features, and the next main section will attempt to do so by bringing a few specific works to the foreground. This way, we may find some answers regarding the questions of the representation of Transcendentalism in Ives's music.

The song "Thoreau", already introduced above, is an adaptation of a part of the "Concord Sonata". As many of Ives's songs, the piece is very short, but its relative simplicity allows one to better appreciate the ideas behind it. The beginning is immediately unusual, as it opens with the singer reciting spoken text adapted from the "Sounds" chapter of Walden. The text is a short reflection on the "faint sound of the Concord bell" that seeps into the stillness of the woods and merges with its natural sounds, thus evoking in Thoreau the "vibrations of the universal lyre" (Thoreau 86). Ives underscores this with the piano playing eerie chords that imitate church bells, and thus fall under naturalism in our categorization. However, the sounds of the piano are distinct enough from a church bell that they serve the point that the text makes: that the bells' sounds are but part of a whole. The next short lines are properly sung, to lyrics which were also taken from the same chapter and altered: "He grew in those seasons like corn in the night, rapt in revery, on the Walden shore, amidst the sumach, pines and hickories, in

undisturbed solitude" (103). Thoreau called music "the crystallization of sounds" (qtd. in Watson 8), which echoes the passage above.

Many other lyrics in the volume are written by Ives himself, revealing him also as a potent lyricist. "The New River", for example is another one for which he composed the music and also wrote the text; a short contemplation on how the natural sounds of water have been replaced by the noises of the city and factories. "The River Gods are gone" could be a reference to the Native Americans that used to inhabit the land, and indeed, one other song is "The Indians", composed on Charles Sprague's haunting text (29). This suggests a sensitivity to these issues similar to Emerson's sentiments regarding abolition. It is important to note that while Ives was not vocal about his beliefs regarding these matters, he was staunchly democratic, and believed in equality and power of "common folk". While he did not follow in the footsteps of the few forgotten composers, who attempted to write pieces based on Native American melodies, he definitely incorporated plantation songs, spirituals and ragtime, historically connected to African Americans, into his works. Antonín Dvořák, head of the National Conservatory of Music between 1890 and 1894 wrote: "negro tunes should be called American music" (qtd. in Budiansky 81), but few dared to follow his advice. Ives, in his quest to "democratize music", wanted to proselytize the American art music community to realize the potential in the "plain and honest" melodies sung and played by ordinary people.

It is also important to consider that religious and church music has been a prevalent inspiration for Ives, and his *114 Songs* include many examples. Nr. 20 from the same volume, "Hymn" is set to the text of an old Methodist hymn "Thou hidden love of God". The motto of the song is a quotation from Marion David Shutter's *Applied Evolution* which claims that Emerson reportedly thought this to be "the supreme hymn" (47). The significance of religion in Transcendentalist philosophy has already been discussed, and it is perhaps not unreasonable to claim that one path that led Ives to his appreciation and use of religious melodies and texts

was through Transcendentalism. The other reason may be that he thought church is the place where any churchgoer may have musical experiences – and these were, in the mind of Ives, more honest and valuable than fancy concerts.

Perhaps one of the most highly renowned, but also maybe one of the least accessible pieces of Ives is the "Piano Sonata No. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840-60.", commonly called simply the "Concord Sonata". Completed around 1915, and first published in 1920, the circa 45-minute long piece stands as one of the composer's greatest contributions to his output of works related to Transcendentalism. The work consists of four movements, entitled "Emerson", "Hawthorne", "The Alcotts", and "Thoreau", respectively. The piece is extraordinary in many ways: for example, the first and last movements include short optional parts for a viola and a flute, respectively, and the second movement requires the use of a piece of wood of predetermined size to depress many keys at once, forming a cluster. The musical language is unmistakably Ives: like in his orchestral works, atonal, polytonal, polyrhythmic, and chaotic sections are interspersed with small islands of deceptive harmony and simplicity, especially in the "Hawthorne" movement – these islands are collectively called "the Hymn" by Ives ("Concord Sonata" 69). The third movement, "The Alcotts" is an outlier, as it consists of traditional tonality evolving into bitonality, but it never loses a certain Romantic quality which makes it perhaps more accessible than the rest of the piece. While musical quotation is not as prevalent as – we will discover – it is in his orchestral works, it still has a structural quality: the well-known four-note "Fate" motif from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony permeates the movements, and is revealed most noticeably in "The Alcotts". The similarity of the Beethoven fragment to Heinrich C. Zeuner's "Missionary Chant" (a hymn tune Ives also used in other pieces, notably the final movement of "Three Places in New England") serves as a ready-made channel between two musical worlds (Marshall 54). However, the relationship of the piece with Beethoven's motif may not be entirely explained through such compositional technicalities;

with Ives, there is always a reason to suspect that his composition works on many different levels. Ives explicitly explains the significance of the motif: “the soul of humanity knocking at the door of divine mysteries, radiant in the faith that it WILL be opened” (*Essays* 45). Marc Estrin points out the “artificial” quality of the downward major third interval, as opposed to the minor third which is found in countless children’s songs all over the world (88). Beethoven’s Fifth opens with the former one followed by the latter, and they both can also be found in the Concord Sonata; the beginning of “The Alcotts”, for example, retains the order of major-minor. The Hymn fragments in the second movement are dominated by the major third. It may be, as Estrin claims, that they each signify the human soul in its “natural state”, and the soul “passed through art, maturity and civilization (89).”

The “Concord Sonata”, especially its “Emerson” movement is by no means an easy-listening piece. Nor is it easy (or perhaps even possible) to decipher by ear the emotional and intellectual content Ives claims to have attempted to mediate. As it has been established before, symbolism as a means of representation relies on an understanding of a completely arbitrary connection between musical and extramusical substance. *Essays before a Sonata* and Ives’s performance notes included at the end of the second edition (1947) make a compelling case for taking the sheer intentionality of the piece seriously, no matter the first impressions. As some excerpts below will prove, Ives’s performance notes are unlike anything a composer or editor would typically care to attach to the appendix of a score. Immediately on the first page of the first movement, he indicates an end note with an asterisk. The note is a general instruction:

> Throughout this movement, and to some extent the others, there are many passages not to be too evenly played and in which the tempo is not precise or static; it varies usually with the mood of the day, as well as that of Emerson, the other Concord bards, and the player. (69)

This reflects the idea which is perhaps at the root of why Ives had so many problems with calling a piece finished: to his ears, it never sounded the same twice (Budiansky 19). This also makes it clear that Ives was composing very consciously even in case of his most dissonant and seemingly chaotic works: he tried to write down the piece exactly as he believed it *should* sound. It may be considered that his strong sense of "honesty" in music was hurt by the idea of not writing something down in the way it was "supposed to sound".

The second and third movements are the longest and shortest, respectively, and they may be differentiated from the other two based on Ives treatment of them in *Essays before a Sonata*: Hawthorne (part of the Concord group, but not a Transcendentalist himself) and Bronson and Louise May Alcott were not considered significant by Ives in terms of their philosophy, but on other grounds. The "Hawthorne" movement, Ives writes, is not inspired by his moral philosophy, but rather his writings on supernatural and fantastic matters (49).

Even during his most productive years Ives only had his piano and his inner ear to serve him when composing, a fact which makes his orchestral output even more remarkable. The observant listener may find that many of Ives's works, or at least parts of them are in fact arrangements of other pieces, such as the third, "Fugue" movement of the "Fourth Symphony", which is an orchestrated version of the first movement of Ives's first string quartet. The second movement of said symphony "Comedy" is an extended orchestral version of Ives's earlier piano piece "The Celestial Railroad". This is a perfect example of a programmatic piece – the basis is on Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "The Celestial Rail-road", which is itself a paraphrase of John Bunyan's allegory "The Pilgrim's Progress" (Brodhead 390). It is a cautionary tale that warns believers not to look for an easy way into heaven, because that is the devil's temptation. This easy way is symbolized by a railroad, which is supposed to take the pilgrims to heaven under comfortable circumstances, but when they come close, it turns out that the "Mr Smooth-it-away" character, who invited them to the train in the first place, is the devil himself, and the

final destination is hell instead. Ives's rendition follows the plot in broad strokes, and there are some easily recognizable parts. The arrival of the train for example, which begins with a faint suggestion of the thumping of the wheels on the rails, which quickens and becomes louder and louder, and the high wind instruments which represent the whistle of the train introduce an explosively cacophonic section. These naturalistic effects are in stark contrast with some calm sections. In one of these, there is an appearance of an interesting compositional technique of Ives's, called a "shadow", where a few instruments play a very quiet texture that is usually off-key, and off-meter compared to the main orchestral parts. The "shadow" part here is given to a quarter-tone piano (marked as optional for practical reasons), which accompanies a solo violin playing the well-known gospel song "Beulah Land". The ghastly sound of tonality and microtonality colliding symbolizes the devil's evil intent behind the promise of heaven. The same shadowing is employed in the "New England Holidays Symphony", particularly in the last part of "George Washington's Birthday", where one of the first violins "breaks away" from the rest and quietly accompanies the orchestra with the tune "Pigtown Fling", in a different key and meter (Budiansky 171). The amount of polytonality and polymetry[14] in Ives's orchestral pieces is indeed remarkable.

Not only did Ives expand his piano pieces into orchestral ones, the opposite can also be found – the "First Orchestral Set, A New England Symphony: Three Places in New England" was originally intended as a work for large symphony orchestra, but Ives rearranged it for a smaller chamber orchestra for practical reasons. This set of pieces was the first Ives work to be heard abroad (in Paris in 1931) and has been regarded as an exemplary work of the composer ever since (Von Glahn Cooney 277). It is important to note the special way Ives treats a "place" in his works: it is never simply a geographical location but is ingrained with the events, impressions and collective memories connected to it. In some other works, such as the "Third Symphony: Children's Day at the Camp Meeting" it is Ives's own memories that are in the

foreground, in “Three Places”, the historical significance of the places is the main raison d’étre of the pieces, even though Ives also had a personal connection to them. The “St Gaudens in Boston Commons (Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and His Colored Regiment)” recalls a moment from the Civil War. “Putnam’s Camp in Redding, Connecticut” is the “fast movement” of the three, bursting with energy; chaos held together by tightly woven strings of order. The theme practically requires Ives to use material from military marches such as the “British Grenadiers”. The last movement, “The Housatonic at Stockbridge” is again a quite serene piece (apart from a loud climax near the end), dominated by a melody based on “Missionary Chant”, the hymn that was already mentioned in connection with the “Concord Sonata”. It should be mentioned that this piece also has been used by Ives as the basis of song in *114 Songs*, with the same title. The motto of the movement, by Robert Underwood Johnson, poet, writer, naturalist and a favourite of Ives as for lyrics, is sung in this version, and the piano imitates the muted strings that accompany the whole movement. A footnote by Ives says: “it was intended that the upper strings, muted, be listened to separately or sub-consciously as a kind of distant background of mists seen through the trees or over a river valley (*114 Songs* 31)” which indicates his interest in the subconscious, or unconscious – something that may be typically a modern idea, but Ives may have felt that it had some connection to Transcendentalism. This is once again a display of Ives’s peculiar “shadow” technique. Representing the haze of mists over the river can be considered an idea borrowed from impressionism – indeed Ives himself may be considered an impressionist, at least at times. Representing fog, for example, with a blurred or semi-concealed musical texture is symbolism rather than pictorialism, but this symbol is not unique to Ives, therefore it is easier to perceive and understand through listening to the music. As it has been mentioned, nature was considered central in Transcendentalist philosophy, therefore it is logical to suspect that Ives was led by similar convictions when he set out to represent natural phenomena.

Conclusion

The takeaway from the above considerations must be that Charles Ives had at the very least two general devices he used extensively to achieve his goal of representing Transcendentalism in his music. *Musical quotation and allusion* allow connections beyond the level of the singular piece. Whether direct or abridged quotation, or the evocation of a certain genre or style through orchestration and other features, these devices is used by Ives to construct and access a certain kind of "collective musical unconscious", and attempt to render it in music while preserving the blurry and flowing nature of memory. *Simultaneity of independent events* – whether achieved through polymetry, polytonality, or something else – allows the composer to capture the ever-changing multitude of life and nature. The core idea of a *common human experience*, the coexistence of individual and society, unity and diversity is one that Transcendentalism professed to tackle, and that is what is also found in Ives's music. The importance of nature, morality, and spirituality are themes whose abundance in his works is a marker of the extensive influence of Transcendentalist thought. We have found evidence of Ives's usage of naturalism, pictorialism and symbolism, and we can now safely say that these elements were not used haphazardly – the "profound human content" that defines realism in this context is not only present in Ives's works, but it is the product of a strong constructive intention. In stark contrast with the apparent randomness and chaos of many of Ives's pieces, it can be said, with a touch of hyperbole, that not a single note was written aimlessly. Even though our discussion is limited in scope, it is clear that Ives has at the very least attempted to convey Transcendentalism in music – and our previous points indicate that he has succeeded.

Notes

1. It is tempting to compare him to the genius that was W.A. Mozart, for Ives was also said to have a near-perfect auditory memory, and he maintained that in his head he could hear every note of what he was writing down, no matter how complex (Budiansky 19). His apparent ability to treat every sound as equal (or maybe his inability to distinguish) made him possess an entirely novel outlook on what music essentially is and what it means.

2. Unfortunately, the publisher of the eBook edition of Stephen Budiansky's *Mad Music* failed to include proper page numbers. Therefore, the automatic page numbers of the eBook will be used, even if they do not agree with the index of said book.

3. It must be said that the people of Danbury and similar New England towns on one hand tended romanticise and idealise village and farm life, on the other hand often viewed immigrants as a threat to these ideals. Any overly positive description of the times must be treated with critical care.

4. Polytonality is the simultaneous presence of multiple tonal centres (keys or scales). By themselves, the tonalities may consist of traditional harmonies, but heard at the same time, they create an extraordinary effect on the verge of dissonance and consonance.

5. Microtonality is the division of the octave into different units than the standard twelve-tone scale. In Ives's case, this meant the use of quartertones (two pitches whose frequencies have the ratio of the twenty-fourth root of two).

6. Ives's own words suggest that perhaps more at his father's urging than his own volition (Budiansky 55). Even at this young age, he would probably not have shied away from causing a little outrage.

7. A year before he may also have heard Scott Joplin play at the Chicago Columbian Exposition – he attended the exposition to hear a famous organist, but there is no record of him hearing Joplin. Ragtime, however, has found its way to numerous Ives compositions, indicating that he knew and appreciated the genre.

8. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the controversies regarding Ives's claims that he developed new compositional techniques before and independently of his contemporaries. For further information, see Paul, David C. *Charles Ives in the Mirror*. University of Illinois Press, 2013.

9. Pianist Katherine Heyman, for example, claimed to have travelled to the moon and engaged in a love affair with the spirit of then recently deceased composer Alexander Scriabin (Budiansky 197).

10. Serialism is a style of composition that relies on prescribed rules for generating series of tones, and sometimes even rhythms. Traditionally, a series consists of all the twelve tones of the scale, with each one only sounding once (dodecaphony). Specific restrictions to avoid the semblance of usual tonality may be observed.

11. There is something poetic about the way Emerson and Ives both grew up in a post-conflict era.

12. Parnassus, the dwelling place of the Muses, is a universally accepted symbol of art.

13. Romanticism was the defining style in music from the 1830s to the end of the nineteenth century.

14. Polymetry is the simultaneous use of two or more different meters (and usually time signatures). For example, one section of the orchestra plays rhythms grouped into measures every five eighth notes, while another might count four quarter notes for every measure. The two groups would only meet on a downbeat (the first beat of a measure) every ten quarter notes.

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