

## IVES'S SYMPHONY NO.1

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### Abstract

When we think of Charles Ives, we think of him as a composer of innovations. We failed to perceive of him as someone who was taught the traditions and had a solid understanding of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms. This paper will investigate Ives' traditional values versus his innovative ones. His first symphony is an example of how Ives learned, integrated, and developed his traditional knowledge as he borrowed the models from the dead masters, and his contemporaries. This work was an assignment that he wrote for his teacher, Horatio Parker, during his study at Yale. The work was not merely a student assignment piece but contained highly complex and solid musical elements. Many people were misled by the fact that since Ives did not intend to become a

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serious musician, his music was not worth of any respect. Such criticisms were proved as invalid. Due to the complexity of his first Symphony, which was one of his early compositions, it proved that he understood and had the total command in handling complex and large symphonic forms of the tradition.

**Keywords:** Charles Ives; traditional composer; innovative composer;

## Symphony

### บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อนิคกิงชื่อ Charles Ives คนส่วนใหญ่ไม่จะนิคกิงนักประพันธ์ผู้แหวก ขบข้องฉันทลักษณ์ทางดนตรี โดยลีมีป่าว่า ก่อนที่ Ives จะละทิ้งฉันทลักษณ์นั้น เขาก็ได้ศึกษาศาสตร์ดังกล่าวมาอย่างเชี่ยวชาญ เข้าถึงแก่นแท้ของดนตรีของ Bach, Mozart, Beethoven และ Brahms บทความนี้มุ่งที่จะสืบคันดูดนตรีที่พิสูจน์ถึง ความสำเร็จในเชิงฉันทลักษณ์ และขับในการแต่งเพลงที่ Ives ได้นำมาประยุกต์ใช้ เขาก็ได้ยึดแบบแผนมาจากนักประพันธ์ทั้งที่ได้เสียชีวิตไปแล้วและยังมีชีวิตอยู่ร่วมสมัย บทเพลงซึมโพนีหมายเลขอันดับของ Charles Ives เริ่มต้นจากเป็นงานในสมัยที่เขายัง

เป็นนักเรียนที่มหาวิทยาลัย Yale โดยได้รับมอบหมายงานจากอาจารย์ผู้สอน คือ Horatio Parker ด้วยเนื้อหาของดนตรีที่ซับซ้อน และก่อประดับความรู้เชิงดนตรีที่สมบูรณ์แบบเป็นรูปธรรมมาก ทำให้ครุฑายศน์ที่ได้ยินดนตรีของเขาแล้วต่างคิดไปว่า ในเมื่อ Ives ไม่ได้เข้าเรียนเพื่อเป็นนักดนตรีอย่างจริงจัง ดังนั้นดนตรีของเขาก็ไม่สมควรที่จะได้รับการยอมรับและเคารพว่าเป็นดนตรีชั้นสูง อดีติเหล่านี้ได้รับการพิสูจน์แล้วว่าเป็นความคิดที่ผิด เพราะความซับซ้อนของบทชิมโฟนีหมายเลขอหนึ่งของ Ives ได้แสดงให้ประจักษ์แล้วว่า เขายังคงสามารถประพันธ์เพลงชิมโฟนีที่เป็นฉบับทั้งหมดที่มีอย่างสมบูรณ์ตามขั้นบันไดประพันธ์ ถูกต้องตามฉันท์ลักษณ์ คำสำคัญ : Charles Ives; นักประพันธ์เพลงตามฉบับ; นักประพันธ์เพลงในแนวทางใหม่; เพลงชิมโฟนี

## Introduction

Even though Ives did not intend to pursue a career in music, he was considered to be a prolific composer. He wrote four symphonies in total and they represent diverse characters in styles of his musical personality and development. From the earliest work of his first symphony to the last, one can trace his creative developments as they transformed and evolved a great deal. While so much attentions were given to his later symphonies, in which they represent his innovative styles, one might fail to perceive him as someone who was taught the traditions and had solid understanding of the traditions.

### Learn the rules and break them

Ives's Symphony No.1 is an early work. This piece is in fact not a representative of Ives's musical styles that we know of him. In fact, Ives wrote this piece as a student assignment that he submitted to his teacher Horatio Parker for his thesis at Yale, completing his formal study

of music composition. Most often when we think of Charles Ives, we perceive him as someone who breaks away from the 19<sup>th</sup> century traditions. Ives is often recognized as a composer whose musical styles contain creative innovations, discoveries and experimentations which is the opposite of this piece.

#### **Ives, as an imitator or innovator?**

The study of Ives's first symphony allows us to understand his ability as a serious composer in traditional boundaries. The styles and techniques employed in this piece leads us to make comparisons to other Romantic works that were written in the same decades such as Dvorak's Symphony No.9, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6 and so on. The fact that the first symphony was written in traditional style, the piece shows tremendous creativity, techniques, innovations, and uniqueness. It is obvious that this work is, by all means, Ives's conscious effort in imitating the masters, rather than a work that was influenced by other

composers. Ives's in fact expressed his strong dislike to this composition as he noted in his memos, "This music, at least the last three movements, is, if not the worst (No), one of the worst (No), (The last time I played it over, a year or so ago, feel the way I did once.) It was written ('written' is the right word) for a degree - - that is, to complete my four years academic course at Yale. This was a kind of an examination, as in the other courses, all of which had to be passed before the B.A. appeared. In other words, the better and more exactly you imitate the Jonesses, the surer you are to get a degree. I know, because I got one—Yale '98 B.A. –titulo: Artium Liberatium Baccalaurei." (Charles Ives, and John Kirkpatrick. 1991: 45.) It is important to note that Ives was an innovative thinker and he might have over-exaggerated the statement above. The real reason that Ives was not so happy had nothing to do with the craftsmanship or the quality of this piece, but rather the style that this piece was written. In Ives's mind, he felt that music that did not challenge the audience was useless.

## Early musical background

Ives's main musical influences came from his father George Ives and his teacher, Horatio Parker. Charles's father was an accomplished musician himself. He had a solid training in music as a child and by age 17 he directed the union band for the First Connecticut Heavy Artillery. After the war finished, George returned to Danbury, where he taught violin, piano, ear training and harmony. George's musical taste was known to be strange, as he was constantly experimenting in different types of sound and effect. Charles was absorbing from his father unorthodox experiments. An unusual event occurred when George was standing in the middle of a thunderstorm while he heard the ringing bell next door. George rushed in and out trying to figure out the new chords that he was hearing inside him. Another strange experiment was reported by Ives himself in his article, Some Quarter-Tone Impression, "My father had a weakness for quarter-tones (roughly, the tones between adjacent keys on a piano, not reproducible on the piano) - - in fact he didn't stop

even with them. He rigged up a contrivance to stretch 24 or more violin strings and tuned them up to suit the dictates of his own curiosity. He would pick out quarter-tone tunes and try to get the family to sing them—but I remember he gave that up, except as a means of punishment—though we got to like some of the tunes which kept to the usual scale and had quarter-tone notes thrown in. But after working for some time he became sure that some quarter-tone chords must be learned before quarter-tone melodies would make much sense and become natural to the ear and so for the voice.” (Charles Ives, and John Kirkpatrick. 1991: 27.)

There was a strong connection of Charles and his father as he subconsciously absorbed the creative experimental mind from his father. George was an extremely open-minded towards new ideas that helped Ives shaped his musical mind. Charles’ earliest musical training started when he was eight years old. His father gave him complete freedom as

soon as Charles was aware of what he was doing or intended. His father soon later gave him lessons on violin, harmony and counterpoint.

Charles was fortunate to absorb at such young age to solid education in music. His experience in playing in his father's band allowed him to develop his ears and mind of a musician. Basically, Charles was experimenting under the supervision of his father as he recalled in his Memos, "Father used to say, 'If you know how to write a fugue the right way well, then I'm willing to have you try the wrong way—well. But you've got to know what you're doing and why you're doing it.' It was his willingness to have the boys think for themselves—within reason—that I look back on later as quite remarkable, but it didn't seem so to me then as a boy. I had to practice right and know my lesson first, then he was willing to let us roam a little for fun. He somehow kept us in a good balance. It was good for our minds and our ears. As for example (as in making chords a boy's way), if two major or minor thirds can make up a chord, why not more? And also, if you can play a tune in one key, why

can't a feller, if he feels like it, play one in two keys?" (Charles Ives, and John Kirkpatrick. 1991: 47.)

Danbury's attitude towards music at the time was quite discouraging. Music was considered an activity for women on their leisure time. The only occasion that man would perform music was only for an evening to please their wives. If a man commits himself to music as a profession, he will face a tremendous tension and disfavor from his social circle. It is unquestionable that Charles faced this social pressures that people had against his father, since his father was a professional musician. Growing and developing out of these pressures, Ives began to develop his interest in vernacular music, such as marches, minstrel show songs, hymns, and other traditional tunes of American music.

Combining together all these experiences helped shape Ives' early musical development before he entered Yale, to study with Horatio Parker. His unorthodox and orthodox ways of trainings, the social

resistance, and his love for vernacular music have led him to a unique situation. Traces of these forces are evident in his music, especially in the case of the First Symphony, which was an assignment for his senior thesis at Yale under Horatio Parker. This composition helped elevated him to newer understanding and techniques that George did not teacher him in his childhood.

### **Ives and Parker at Yale**

Parker joined Yale the same year that Ives enrolled. Parker was known as an American composer who inherited the European traditions. Parker's two principal teachers were the American composer, George Chadwick, and the German composer Josef Rheinberger. Parker's musical styles was influenced by Liszt, Franck, Beethoven, Wagner, Dvorak, and so on. Ives took counterpoint, instrumentation, strict composition, harmony, and music history. At the same time, Ives also took academic classes such as, Greeks, French, English literature, Latin, mathematics,

philosophy, and history. Ironically enough, Ives did not go to Yale to study music seriously.

Since Ives was actively participating in many organizations such as Delta Kappa Epsilon, and other secret fraternity organization, he was supplying music for their shows. The fact that music was considered nothing in his hometown, Ives was never mentioned as a musician in his class year book.

Ives openly expressed his dislike towards Parker's teaching. Ives felt that his studies with Parker was no more than repeating what he has learnt from his father, perhaps the most he benefited from this was some expansion of certain techniques. Ives felt that the only major significant influence for his musical development was his father. I believe that Ives felt this way because of his reaction he had towards Parker's musical authoritarianism. But Ives had benefitted a great deal from Parker such as the technique of employing opposing tonalities and

rhythms. The way to subtly insert quotations from popular songs in the music. Ives in fact indicated in his memos his sincere admiration for Parker, "I had a great deal of respect for Parker and most of his music. (It was seldom trivial – his choral works have a dignity and depth that many of his contemporaries, especially in the field of religious and choral composition did not have. Parker had ideals that carried him higher than the popular) but he was governed too much by German rule, and in some ways was somewhat hard-boiled." (Charles Ives, and John Kirkpatrick. 1991: 49.)

I personally believe that perhaps Ives might have misunderstood Parker. It seems very natural to me that any teacher would focus on making sure that their students understand the rudiments of music thoroughly. Perhaps Parker was aware of the tremendous talents that Ives had and did not intend to mislead him. Parker wanted to make sure that Ives really understood the essential knowledge and techniques that were required. Ives took it personally that Parker didn't care for the

student radical creativity as he claimed that Parker was mean and frequently criticizing him for his innovative ideas and technique.

### **The process of Ives' first Symphony**

Ives disfavored the process of writing the First Symphony under the supervision of Parker. Due to the fact that this piece was a massive composition that required solid cohesion and flow to the piece. It was tough for Ives to meet up to Parker's standard. Ives said in his memos, "The first movement was changed. It (that is, the symphony) was supposed to be in D minor, but the first subject went through six or eight different keys, so Parker made me write another first movement, but it seemed no good to me, and I told him that I would prefer to use the first draft. He smiled and let me do it and said 'But you must promise to end in D minor.' (And also he didn't like the original slow movement, as it started on G-flat—he said it should start of F. Near the end, 'the boys got going'—so at the request of Parker and Kaltenborn, I wrote a nice

formal me—but the first is better.” (Charles Ives, and John Kirkpatrick. 1991: 51.)

This symphony was written between 1898 and 1902. It consists of four movements. What is unique about this composition is that Ives synthesized models of many composers who came before him such as Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky. There were two ways that

he

employed pre-existing materials throughout the piece. First, he modeled the whole movements on forms, keys sequences, and the composition procedures of the work by other composers. Second, he borrowed melodic outlines from famous melodies of other composers. According to Peter Burkholder, melodic traces of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Dvorak and Tchaikovsky are found throughout the movements.

The first movement is modeled in the sonata allegro form. It is

well-proportioned and contained a long exposition of 228 measures in length. It is unique in a way that it contained three themes in three different keys. Each theme is frequently repeated as it contains long transitional passages linking between them. The development, in the length of 105 measures, is based on three parts of the thematic materials from the exposition. The recapitulation is the abridged version of the exposition lasting 132 measures. It is surprising that none of thematic materials were abandoned but Ives chose to eliminate certain repetitions of the thematic materials. The first movement ends briefly

**Adagio molto (sostenuto)**

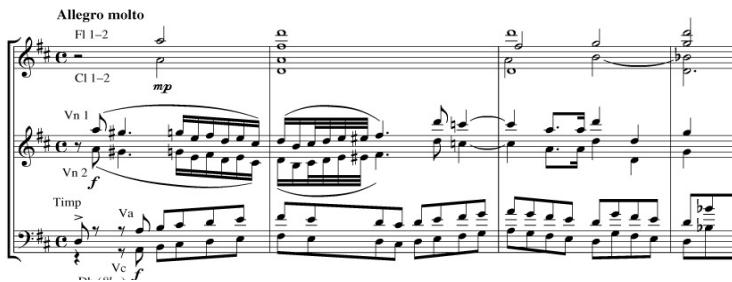
with the coda in the size of 52 measures in tonic key.

The second movement is in a ternary form, A-B-A. The A section contained series of short themes combined together. It is simple in

harmonic progressions as the opening tonic chord last for three and a half measures. It is slow in term of the harmonic rhythm and homophonic in texture. The moving bass-line reminds us of a song with simple melodies and accompaniment. The B section only contained one theme, but more elaborated than the previous section. The A and B section are very similar in term of harmony and texture. The only difference is that the B section is moving quicker in term of harmonic rhythm. The return of A' marks the most striking feature as Ives combined thematic materials from the first movement simultaneously with the A materials of the second movement. The idea of combining themes in this section helped intensify the complexity of the previous sections which were rather simple. According to Peter Burkholder, this movement gives a strong resemblance to the second movement of the Dvorak's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony.



The third movement is written in a style of scherzo and trio. It is in a rounded binary form with the A section made up of two fugal expositions. The scherzo begins with the baroque style of fugal texture but it contains romantic characteristics in its writing. The style of the scherzo is similar to a fugue except the fact that every voice enters in the same key makes it not entirely traditional. The first 19 measures could be considered a canon. The B section could be considered an episode, and the return of A' section is a return of the fugal expositions. The A' differs from the A only by a slight change of instrumentations. The design of the trio begins in major key contrasting with the minor key scherzo. The trio is calmer in character and mainly homophonic in texture. It is modeled in a rounded binary form. In this section, Ives employed the two-part writing rather than the fugal style previously used in the scherzo.



The fourth movement is in sonata allegro form. It is symmetrically proportioned. The recapitulation is almost the same length as the exposition. The slight difference is that seven measures are added to the first theme when it returns in the recapitulation and at the same time two measures were taken out so it ended up adding 5 measures. The first theme of this movement is extended by repetitions with various instrumentations which made the returned of A' in the recap to be reversing the role switching between string and wind.

The second theme is less complex, and the theme is divided into two sections having both repeated. Again we see variety of switching between instrumentations, as Tchaikovsky employed it in his 6<sup>th</sup>

Symphony. The reversal role of strings and winds continued in the development section. At this point the theme is developed in the scope of two-measure fragments rather than the complete phrase. There is a new theme appearing in this development which was presented canonically.

The most striking aspect of this movement is the length of the coda. It is considered to be one of the longest coda lasting 134 measure longs. There are three sections in the coda. The A section consists of five short parts combined together without transitions. The B section is more unified and a clear two-part form. The C section contained several themes and it is similar to the A section. The fact that this section has many themes, it gives us a sense of a rondo in form.

## Conclusion

When we think of Ives's composition as a work following the traditions, we perceive of him learning from dead masters, but in Ives's case, he learnt from both the dead and the living ones. Dvorak was alive at the time that Ives wrote this piece, and as there were melodic outlines that Ives borrowed from Dvorak's Symphony No.9 and also in the fourth movement of Ives's Symphony there were melodic traces from Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.6, in which Tchaikovsky wrote this piece in 1893, which was the same year as Dvorak's Ninth Symphony. So Ives did not only learn from the traditional masters, but the masters are also his contemporaries.

This work showed that Horatio Parker helped Ives expand the awareness of compositional practice though the study of the Romantic masterpieces. Ives learned how to write a piece by imitating models.

Parker taught him the art of orchestration, and techniques on how to develop materials in larger forms.

Ives was a skilled orchestrator and had a solid understanding of compositional techniques. He could be conservative if he chose to. It is important to understand that Ives's musical image as a composer at the time varied from the strongest disfavor to the total support. The negative opinions arose from the fact that his profession was not for music but insurance. Many musicians felt that since he was not a serious musician, perhaps his music was not worth of any respect or value. Due to the complexity of his first Symphony which was one of his early compositions, it proved that he understood and had the total command in handling complex and large symphonic form of the tradition.

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