



# Charles E. Ives Memos

A source book incorporating  
all the most important  
unpublished writings  
of America's great composer.

Edited by John Kirkpatrick

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Charles E. Ives  
- *Memoirs* -

*Edited by JOHN KIRKPATRICK*

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Ives wrote and dictated the *Memos*  
to answer questions  
from people curious about his music.  
In his mind and heart  
it was dedicated to them all.



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## Preface

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Born in Danbury, 20 October 1874, with extraordinary talents (musical, athletic, generally original)—educated by his father, the Danbury Schools (1881–91), Danbury Academy (1891–93), Hopkins Grammar School (1893–94), Yale University (1894–98)—Ives for twenty years led a double life of insurance man by day and composer by night, weekends, and vacations. When the United States entered the First World War, he worked hard for the Red Cross and Liberty Loan drives, and in September 1918 he was confident that another physical test would remove any doubt about his fitness to drive an ambulance in France. Less than a month later his first heart attack, a severe one, called a halt and imposed a quiet assessment.

The piece he most liked to play, usually in snatches, each time with new variants, was still partly hasty sketches, so among the first acts of his convalescence were finishing the clear ink copies of both *Concord* and the *Essays*. Privately printed in 1920, these were sent to many people who Ives hoped would be interested. Though much of his earlier music had been played or sung in public, particularly by choirs and church soloists, there is not a single Ives performance on record between 1902 (when he resigned from his last church job) and 1920 that was not of his own instigation. But now, at the first sight of these printings, Henry Bellamann immediately recognized a significant new voice, and started a new breed of Ives enthusiasts.

No sooner were *Concord* and the *Essays* in print than Ives set about putting his songs and potential songs in order, adding many new ones. These were also privately printed as *114 Songs* in 1922, and again sent to many prominent musicians. Apparently the first singer to include them in public recitals was George Madden.

In the fall of 1923, the French pianist, E. Robert Schmitz, met Ives while in search of insurance. Friend of Debussy, founder and president

of Pro Musica, Schmitz engineered performances in 1925 of Ives's quarter-tone music, and in 1927 of the first two movements of the *Fourth Symphony*, conducted by Eugene Goossens, Schmitz playing the solo piano part, Bellamann supplying program notes.

From this year dates the friendship with Ives of Henry Cowell, whose *New Music* issued the second movement of the *Fourth Symphony* in 1929, and who urged Nicolas Slonimsky to do something of Ives with his Boston Chamber Orchestra. As a result, in 1931, Slonimsky conducted the *Three Places in New England* in New York, Boston, New York again, and Havana—and also in Paris in a series of two Pan-American concerts, the programs of which must be given in full. On Saturday 6 June: Weiss *American Life*, Ives *Three Places in New England*, Ruggles *Men and Mountains*, Cowell *Synchrony*, Roldan *La Rebambaramba*. And on Thursday 11 June: Sanjuan *Sones de Castilla*, Chavez *Energia*, Salzedo *Préambule et Jeux* (Lily Laskine, harpist), Caturla *Bembé*, Riegger *Three Canons*, Varèse *Integrales*.

André Cœuroy, writing in *Gringoire*, spoke for many in calling Slonimsky a Christopher Columbus thanks to whom they had just discovered America—"an astonishingly gifted young musician . . . not only a gifted leader . . . but he has a finesse of ear that renowned conductors might envy. . . . What seemed most striking . . . was the contrast between North and South. . . . Ives, with his *Three Places in New England*, composed over twenty years ago, strong and original in rhythm . . . seems the most interesting. . . ."

Emile Vuillermoz in *Excelsior*: "A dozen extremely interesting scores were revealed to us . . . so new and original as to deserve long study. . . . In the *Three Places in New England* . . . one meets an astonishing prescience . . . this is a painter's orchestration . . . and it is a real find, to have imagined two village bands . . . in different tempi. . . ."

Paul le Flem in *Comœdia*: "One of them, Charles Ives, seems, before *Le Sacre du Printemps*, to have forged himself a style which, by its boldness, puts him among the precursors. Beside his compatriots, he appears the most spontaneously gifted. . . ."

Others suspected a modern academicism. Florent Schmitt in *Le Temps*: "It is improbable that, if Stravinsky had not invented *Le Sacre du Printemps* or Schoenberg *Pierrot Lunaire*, most of these works would ever have seen daylight." But he acknowledges Ives as "a very erudite musician-philosopher."

Boris de Schloezer in *Les Beaux-Arts* (Brussels): "Even if one admits . . . that these innovators only follow, more or less ably, Schoenberg, Hindemith, and Stravinsky . . . we owe a debt of gratitude to Slonimsky. . . ." But de Schloezer seems to contradict himself in the case of Ives, "a true precursor, a bold talent . . . who, going straight ahead on

his own path . . . has discovered many of the procedures in vogue today. With him, in spite of or because of his awkwardness, this modernism acquires a wholly individual flavor."

Back in the States, these critiques were seen not only by Ives, and some of the words quoted above may have been the basis of an editorial by Philip Hale in *The Boston Herald* of Tuesday 7 July: "Nicolas Slonimsky of Boston, indefatigable in furthering the cause of the extreme radical composers, has brought out in Paris orchestral compositions by Americans who are looked on by our conservatives as wild-eyed anarchists. He thus purposed to acquaint Parisians with contemporaneous American music. But the composers represented were not those who are regarded by their fellow-countrymen as leaders in the art, nor have they all been so considered by the conductors of our great orchestras. If Mr. Slonimsky had chosen a composition by Loeffler, Hill, one of Deems Taylor's suites, Foote's suite, or music by some who, working along traditional lines, have nevertheless shown taste, technical skill and a suggestion at least of individuality, his audience in Paris would now have a fairer idea of what Americans are doing in the art.

"Are these Parisians to be blamed if they say that the American composers thus made known to them are restless experimenters, or followers of Europeans whose position in the musical world is not yet determined, men who show ingenuity chiefly by their rhythmic inventions and orchestral tricks; men who apparently have no melodic gift, or, having it, disdain it for the tiresome repetition and transformation of an insignificant pattern; who neglect the sensuous charm of stringed instruments and put their trust for startling effects in combinations of wind and percussion choirs; followers, but with unequal footsteps, of Stravinsky, Prokofieff and certain continental composers of whom Hindemith is a prominent example?

"It may be true that old musical forms are passing. No one demands that a composer today should make a fetish of the sonata form, provided he show skill and eloquence, and sends forth music that charms or impresses outside that cast-iron form. How many of those now throwing overboard sane rules, traditions of proved worth—the adventurous and daring souls—have contributed to the glory of the art?

"They may say that they are writing for posterity. It is a proud boast, but posterity is an uncertain audience. The great composers did not say, 'Hang the age; I'm writing for the years to come.' They wrote because there was something in them that must out. They enlarged or modified the forms accepted in their own day, still preserving harmonic lines, striving for a personal expression along these lines, in harmonic and orchestral invention that would bring strength and beauty. That

great innovator Claude Debussy, trained in the severe school of the Paris Conservatory, did not turn his back on what he had learned; he utilized it as an indispensable aid to the outward revelation of his own thoughts and visions."

The day Hale's editorial appeared, A. H. Handley (Slonimsky's Boston manager) wrote Ives: "Thank you very much indeed for your check of the 6th which I really appreciate. I likewise appreciate the copy of the cable Mr. Slonimsky sent you. . . . We have, however, received two packages of programs like the enclosed and, following out our usual methods, sent copies of this program to all of the newspapers here in Boston. The enclosed editorial headed 'Mr. Slonimsky in Paris' written by Philip Hale himself will undoubtedly be of interest to you. What we have got to do is really believe what we so often know to be true, 'that every knock is a boost'."

Ives's sketch of a reply to Handley survives: "Thank you for [your] note and the enclosed pretty lines from a nice old lady. Mr. Hale has quite the philosophy of Aunt Maria—'When you don't understand some'm, scold some'n.' Where does he get all the facts underneath his 'ultimatum'—where does he find the authority for all his sweeping statements? All the Paris papers which I've seen give rather the opposite impression [from the one] that Mr. Hale hands out to Boston. One of the easiest things for some men and most ladies to do, is to make predilection, prejudice and feebly examined premises resemble statement of facts. Does Mr. Hale actually know all this music he knows so much about?—and do the conductors of orchestras, in whose mouths Hale puts his 'opinions,' know it? I can say for one—they do not.

"Hale gives an opinion in such a way that it sounds (at least to me) as a 'pronunciato'—he is willing to have his readers think that it's the only opinion and the only right opinion. The casual reader (and 90 percent of the people are casual readers) will take it as such. Every human being is more or less a partialist, but partialism itself is always a 'half-truth.' What Mr. Hale [says] is partially true—in every movement in art, in politics, in every kind of evolution, there is a struggle for a changing bad, good, and towards perfection. But it sounds to me that he wants everybody to think that there is only one kind of good music and he knows exactly what it is—which is what he has been brought up on—what he has been told—what he has limited his mind and ears to—habit forming thoughts and sounds—which go on in the cosmic process of degeneration, whether in art, business, religion, or any part of humanity.

"If men like that were the only influence in music or any art—it would die out of the world—it would first fall into a static, adding-

machine state—and finally into a pretty 'lily pad' over its own tombstone.

"Just to show the other side of things, I'm sending a few translations of some criticisms in Slonimsky's letter—also a few sentences in which he gives, not his own impression, but what he has heard from others, and the reactions of the public in general (a conductor, at all sensitive, can quite readily feel the general trends of any audience)." [Unfortunately there are lacunae in the letters from Slonimsky that Ives kept, that make one suspect that Ives sent parts of the letters themselves to Handley, which cannot have survived the dissolution of Handley's managerial office.]

Then, on Sunday 12 July 1931, the *New York Times* printed a long review of the past season, dated 1 July, by their Paris correspondent, Henry Prunières, including detailed critiques of a few recent concerts: ". . . The presentation of American music has been the object of two symphony concerts directed by Nicolas Slonimsky, leader of the Boston Chamber Orchestra. They revealed to Paris the works of the advance guard of the young American and Antillean schools, which are wholly unknown here and, with the exception of the compositions of Edgar Varèse, a naturalized Franco-American, little known, I believe, even in the United States.

"I cannot say that these concerts had a very great success. The first left a terrible impression of emptiness, which the second succeeded in effacing only in part. If it be true that Charles Ives composed his *Three New England Scenes* before acquaintance with Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, he ought to be recognized as an originator. There is no doubt that he knows his Schoenberg, yet gives the impression that he has not always assimilated the lessons of the Viennese master as well as he might have. The second part, with its truculent parody of an American march in the Sousa vein and the unloosing of its percussion achieves a picturesque effect. The third part presents a typical American theme with pretty orchestral effects. The composer is manifestly a musician. . . .

"The only thing that caught my attention was the paroxysmal tendency of the writers, which was curious to note. It corresponds pretty well to the intensity of living and the precipitate rhythm in the great American cities. We are no doubt in the presence of a school still in the embryonic stage in which the influences of Europe are all too easily discernible. In it, however, are undeniably some germs of originality. Credit is due these explorers. . . ."

Some discussion among members of the Pan-American Association of Composers (including Ives) may have preceded the reply to Prunières by the secretary, Adolph Weiss, which was dated 18 July 1931, and

printed in the *Times* on Sunday the twenty-sixth: "Mr. Prunières's article on 'American Music in Paris,' printed in the *New York Times* of July 12, does not do justice to the importance of this event. Americans, reading this article, will hardly feel that the compositions performed are at all significant. But permit me to cite what a few of the principal critics of Parisian papers have said in some of the long first-page reviews of the two Pan-American concerts given in Paris on the 6th and 11th of June.

"Paul Le Flem, critic of *Comœdia*: 'Nicolas Slonimsky presented compositions of the composers who are representative of the avant-garde of the contemporary American school, Weiss, Ives, Ruggles and Cowell. These four composers lay claim to the most recent and disquieting acquisitions of the music of today. They live in this atmosphere, their natural element. Synthetic chordal structures, intertwining counterpoints, harsh orchestral sonorities that despise mezzotints; these are their common traits. One feels a daring craftsmanship among these courageous pioneers, more volitional, more cerebral than emotional.'

"Émile Vuillermoz, *Excelsior*: 'There is in these works a benevolence [*une générosité*], a faith, and a glowing life which makes them all extremely sympathetic in spite of their crude form, their polytonality, or their aggressive atonality.'

"Paul Dambly: 'At the moment of its close the musical season experienced a sudden shock through two concerts conducted by Slonimsky, which enabled us to discover the New World a second time.'

"And so I might continue to cite from the eight columns of newspaper clippings before me, in which the compositions are reviewed collectively and individually."

All these thoughts went on rankling in Ives's mind, coloring a letter to Schmitz on 10 August (in §3), and were unburdened in the first drafts (no longer extant) of the letter to "Dear Sirs and Nice Ladies" which starts these *Memos*—the earlier drafts being implied by the double dating at the end of §4: "Aug. 1931—Mch. 1932." But this imaginary open letter turned out to be only the introduction to an autobiographical scrapbook of reminiscence designed not only to show that Hale, Prunières, and others didn't know what they were talking about, but also to supply information to a fast-growing nucleus of Ives enthusiasts.

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Throughout this editing of the *Memos*, the different sources are indicated on the left-hand margins by the following symbols:

M = the earliest extant manuscript, pp. 1-16 and [18]—(p. 17 and the rest missing—see Appendix 1). The brilliant performance of seven Ives songs by Hubert Linscott and Aaron Copland at Yaddo, on Sunday



1 May 1932, was a revelation to all present—as expressed in Wallingford Riegger’s letter of 4 May: “Your beautiful songs that were given at Yaddo aroused not only enthusiasm . . . but keen appreciation in the numerous composers present. . . . There was much curiosity about the facts of your life—musical and otherwise. . . . Will you not consider seriously the recording of rather copious biographical matter concerning yourself, that you could dictate from time to time to a stenographer?”

By this time, Ives was doing just that—dictating from M to Miss Florence Martin, who had been doing part-time secretarial work for him. (Unfortunately the Ives family lost contact with Miss Martin—her most recent known address in 1947 offers no forwarding address, and in view of her devotion to the Iveses it may be presumed that she passed on shortly thereafter.)

As Ives’s dictating became more concerned with particular works, he merely listed the titles in the order he wanted to follow. As a result, the first and third parts of the *Memos* are largely written out in M, but the second part is mostly a table of contents (pp. 11–12 of M) with a few key words as reminders. Whether he read from what he had already written (changing and interpolating as he went along), or made it up out of his head, Miss Martin took his words down faithfully in shorthand. Apparently Ives, who could be very reticent with his manuscripts, did not suggest that she take the pages of M home with her to check from, in typing.

T = Miss Martin’s first set of typed pages from her shorthand (pp. 1–73, both originals and carbons, skipping p. 35, perhaps to leave room for a projected insertion never filled in). Many details reveal that her shorthand reproduced consonants better than vowels (for instance, in §13, first sentence, M9: “suppressed”—T11: “surprised”), and that she was not entirely at ease with musical terms. There are no clues showing when Ives dictated from which pages of M, but at the top of p. 12, over “Orches Sets Ist” he wrote in pencil “Start Sat.”—then crossed out “Sat” adding “Thurs.” Half way down, at “Holidays,” he wrote “begin Sat”—but there is no telling if what was planned above for Saturday was put ahead to the preceding Thursday or had to be put off till the next Thursday. Nor is it known if Miss Martin came every day—maybe only on Ives’s “good days.” In any case, the material between “Thurs” (above) and “Sat” (half way down) comprises pp. 30–39 of T, and if this represents two sessions, it suggests a rough equivalent of four or five pages of T per session.

An undated letter from Edith (as her father’s amanuensis) to John J. Becker, possibly of Wednesday 6 April 1932, says that they plan to