

## Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Born in Danbury, CT, Charles Ives is considered one of the U.S.'s most innovative, yet unlikely classical music composers. Though trained as a church organist, past his teens he never held a full-time job as a musician, he wrote without regard to what audiences would like, and though he used tonalities, poly-rhythms, and forms that were distinctly modern in his symphonies, his work was deeply grounded in American traditional music; hymns, folks songs, fiddle tunes, Stephen Foster songs, and even ragtime. A successful businessman by day and composer by night, Ives's huge and innovative output has gradually brought him recognition as the most original and significant American composer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among other things, he was deeply inspired by transcendentalist philosophy; his second piano sonata, subtitled *Concord, Mass., 1840–60*, carried musical impressions of Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts, and Thoreau, and others. Socially committed Liberal Christian New Englanders, Ives and his wife maintained an idealism about America that is reflected in his music; Ives took up subjects from Matthew Arnold's *West London* to the movement to abolish slavery (*Study no.9: the Anti-Abolitionist Riots in the 1830s and 40s*).

As a musical member of the American Romantic movement, Ives sought to convey emotional experience, memory, and sense of place in his music, and many of his pieces were written to recall specific experiences and events: (*Decoration Day, Washington's Birthday, The Fourth of July, Putnam's Camp*), the American Civil War (*The 'St Gaudens' in Boston Common*), and camp meetings (*Symphony no.3, Violin Sonata no.4, The Rockstrewn Hills Join in the People's Outdoor Meeting*). *The Housatonic at Stockbridge* calls to mind a walk by the river Ives and his wife shared soon after their marriage, and *Central Park in the Dark* pictures the noises and music of the city against the background sounds of nature.

Because he was such a successful businessman, Ives did not pursue fame as a musician, so most of his work was not heard until later in his life. In 1947, Ives was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his *Symphony No. 3*, and by the time he died, he had received international recognition for his extraordinary musical accomplishments.

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