

CHARLES
IVES

A SONGBOOK

ENSEMBLE FÜR
NEUE MUSIK ZÜRICH
SEBASTIAN
GOTTSCHICK

"The ever flowing, changing, growing ways of mind & imagination"

– songs and ensemble pieces by Charles Ives, arranged by Sebastian Gottschick

Composed throughout his creative lifetime, Ives' approximately 200 songs occupy a central place in the extensive oeuvre, mostly created between 1898 and 1918. They reflect a compositional vocabulary that is still stunning to this day, not least because it enabled him to emancipate American art music from the European model. In 1922 Ives published a gargantuan volume of *114 Songs*, which not only is a representative selection of these pieces but also an accomplished sonic autobiography that spans the gamut of what American listeners were exposed to in different social contexts around 1900: from the psychologically charged European lied performed in the noble parlours of large East Coast cities to simple church hymns to popular "street songs" sung in rural areas on social or patriotic occasions. Ives, however, added an experimental dimension to his pieces in order to strengthen the listener's "ear and soul muscles". For instance *Majority (The Masses)*, the first song in the collection, is a rousing call for a fairer society conveyed by massive, almost shocking tone clusters in the piano.

Which is just one of the daring compositional techniques that before then had rarely, if ever been employed in European art song: there's also the realistic vocal style that relates to everyday language (and thus abandons the idea of literary psychologisation); the rich and varied use of word and voice (either in the form of a rather spoken than sung comment preceding a song, as in *No. 96*, originally titled *Romanzo di Central Park*, or a spoken text that moves parallel to the autonomous piano part, as in *Thoreau*, which is not included on this CD); the unexpected use of other instruments (like the kazoo); or the adoption of extended vocal techniques like whistling and shouting. As a result Ives achieves a remarkable extension of what singing is. Which raises the question of who is actually singing – a lyrical ego that expresses universal

feelings and moods, or a representative of concrete people? Each song actually ought to be performed by different singers (women, men, old or young) and instrumentalists, but this type of performance has remained a utopian dream to this day.

A maverick approach to music probably best describes such musical thought and action. Ives strongly disapproved of music that was part of a consumption-oriented culture or a mere substitute for religion. To him, musical (art)works were not dead subjects but living subjects that took on a life of their own once he had written them down and hence "planted" them in the world. Their stylistic devices should not be judged by convenient aesthetic values but should be seen as an expression of life as they related to the real world and were full of encoded messages about the (specific) biographical situation of the composer. Ives' musical ideas often came from an improvisational situation and were conceived for the players and listeners of the future. And Ives went even further, as he invited other composers to add to his music, for instance to the *Universe Symphony*, his unfinished legacy.

Ives' musical thinking is infused with the idea of an aesthetic utopia as formulated in a visionary and at the same time very romantic picture in his postface to *114 Songs*: "The instinctive and progressive interest of every man in art, we are willing to affirm with no qualification, will go on and on, ever fulfilling hopes, ever building new ones, ever opening new horizons, until the day will come when every man while digging his potatoes will breathe his own epics, his own symphonies (operas, if he likes it); and as he sits of an evening in his backyard and shirt sleeves smoking his pipe and watching his brave children

in *their* fun of building *their* themes for *their* sonatas of *their* life, he will look up over the mountains and see his visions in their reality [...]”

This emotional picture resonates with an idea of salvation that was present in the philosophy of life at the turn of the century: that art can make the world a better place. But always a pragmatist – a successful insurance man in his regular occupation and a dedicated social reformer in private life – Ives took the supposedly inferior work in the fields as a starting point and insisted that personal expression and creativity be given its place within society. For Ives, music that helps further this cause has “substance”, all other music indulges in mere “manner”. Substance (in the sense Ives intends) is a communicative act between composer, performer and listener. The openness and richness of Ives’ musical philosophy, as we encounter in the songs, also signals an openness and permeability of the compositional process throughout his works. His most favoured Advent hymn *Watchman, Tell Us of the Night*, for instance, is connected with one of the movements of his First Violin Sonata and the first movement of Symphony No.4; there are different versions of *The New River* and *The Housatonic at Stockbridge* – for chorus and chamber ensemble and for large orchestra (as the third movement of *Three Places in New England*) respectively. Besides the piano version of one of Ives’ most suggestive compositions, the Salvation Army piece *General William Booth Enters into Heaven*, there is a version for chorus and military band, plus it was arranged for chorus and chamber orchestra by John Becker under the supervision of the composer in 1934. And Ives went further: regarding one of his major works, the Second, or *Concord*, Sonata for piano as a “work in progress”, he was one of the first composers to make use of this concept; putting together pre-existent movements, he composed the monumental Symphony No. 4, which as a whole creates the utopia of a universal

aesthetic democracy. Sound to Ives is a “garment” that depending on the situation covers and expresses “substance”, which in itself is always more than the sum of its parts, or versions.

Since this way of thinking is characterised by the constant exchange of musical ideas that appear in ever-different instrumental and/or vocal constellations, today’s composers are in a position to bring the potential of Ives’ music closer to our listening experiences. Sebastian Gottschick’s adaptations of Ives’ songs and short instrumental pieces in this sense not only pay homage to the composer but develop his work further. The multifaceted ensemble and the instrumentation Gottschick chose allow him to be highly differentiated in his approach to the specific Ives sound that oscillates between crude realism and symbolist fragmentation: he either deliberately avoids this sound (for instance by using a vibraphone in *Grantchester*) or he pushes it to the point of prismatic refraction. Apart from this, Gottschick’s selection proceeds in a continuous, multi-perspective order that can be interpreted as a drama en miniature, a model of an ordinary day from the snatches of dreams in the morning to the falling night, and finally also as the epitome of the diversity of life itself. Behind all that the power and intangible nature of memories, Ives’ lifelong theme, becomes visible and audible. His music (at times with undisguised sentimentality) speaks of the feeling that the blissful world and experience of childhood is irretrievably lost. However, Ives responds to sorrow and grief with uplifting, life-affirming energy and the deep religious certainty of faith. It is this collision of extremes that creates the unique quality of his music, which to him was the essential and existential expression of the “ever flowing, changing, growing ways of mind & imagination”.

Wolfgang Rathert
translated by Friederike Kulcsar

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Werner X. Uehlinger

Sebastian Gottschick's adaptations of Ives' songs and short instrumental pieces in this sense not only pay homage to the composer but develop his work further. The multifaceted ensemble and the instrumentation Gottschick chose allow him to be highly differentiated in his approach to the specific Ives sound that oscillates between crude realism and symbolist fragmentation: he either deliberately avoids this sound (for instance by using a vibraphone in Grantchester) or he pushes to the point of prismatic refraction. Apart from this, Gottschick's selection proceeds in a continuous, multi-perspective order that can be interpreted as a drama en miniature, a model of an ordinary day from the snatches of dreams in the morning to the falling night, and finally also as the epitome of the diversity of life itself. Behind all that the power and intangible nature of memories, Ives' lifelong theme, becomes visible and audible. *Wolfgang Rathert*

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Arranged for voices and chamber ensemble by Sebastian Gottschick

Jeannine Hirzel, *mezzosoprano* · Omar Ebrahim, *baritone*

ensemble für neue musik zürich:

Hans-Peter Frehner, *flute* · Manfred Spitaler, *clarinet* · Lorenz Raths, *horn* · Lorenz Haas, *percussion*

Viktor Müller, *piano* · Urs Bumbacher, *violin* · Nicola Romanò, *cello* · Anna Trauffer, *double bass*

Sebastian Gottschick, *conductor*

1	Memories	2:30	10	The Housatonic At Stockbridge	3:32	19	Weil' auf mir	1:37
	<i>A: Very Pleasant – B: Rather Sad</i>					20	Like A Sick Eagle	1:44
2	The Circus Band	2:26	11	Intermezzo: No. 96	3:42	21	A Farewell To Land	1:17
3	The Things Our Fathers Loved	1:38	12	The New River	1:01	22	Intermezzo: In the Night	2:40
4	Old Home Day	3:49	13	Walking	2:31	23	The Incantation	1:40
5	Tom Sails Away	2:24	14	Watchman!	1:56	24	Evening	1:23
6	Down East	2:52	15	At the River	2:31			
7	Intermezzo: Scherzo: All the Way Around And Back	1:13	16	General W. Booth Enters Into Heaven	5:18		Total Time DDD ²/_{Bit}	57:18
8	The See'r	1:01	17	Serenity	2:42			
9	Grantchester	4:12	18	Intermezzo: Gyp The Blood	1:26		ISRC 130.1200668 – ISRC 130.1200691	

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