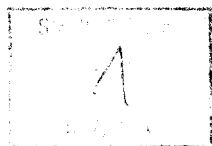


CHARLES IVES

THREE IMPROVISATIONS

for Piano

Transcribed and Edited by
Gail and James Dapogny



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PREFACE

Ives disliked the idea and the experience of making phonograph recordings.¹ Nevertheless, several times in the 1930s and again in 1943 he was recorded at the piano in private studios. The *Three Improvisations* were played at such a session, probably in New York City, on May 11, 1938. On the same occasion, Ives also recorded passages from the “Concord” Piano Sonata and an improvisation based on themes from the third movement of Symphony No. 2.²

The three pieces were titled by Ives simply as “Improvisations”; the numbering given here follows the order in which they have been recorded by Columbia Records. None of these brief works is obviously based on specific pre-existent compositions. However, John Kirkpatrick has written that *Improvisation I* centers around “a phrase that sounds as if it might be part of the lost *Autumn Landscapes from Pine Mountain* (1904)”; that *Improvisation II* “suggests perhaps one of the lost [piano] *Studies*”; and that *Improvisation III* “has chords somewhat like those in the *Waltz-Rondo*.”³

Ives’s playing of the *Three Improvisations* was repressed and issued in 1974 as part of Columbia Records’ five-record album, *Charles Ives: The 100th Anniversary* (M4 32504; M 32508 Mono). They occupy bands 3-5 on side 2 of record IV (BL 32508), and it was from a copy of this recording that the *Improvisations* were transcribed and edited by Gail and James Dapogny.

H. Wiley Hitchcock

This edition has the approval of the Charles Ives Society, Inc., which is furthering and supporting the preparation of critical editions, both new and revised, of the music of Charles Ives. The work of the Society has been made possible by grants from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and a generous bequest from the late Wladimir and Rhoda Lakond.

¹After a visit to the studios of the Columbia Gramophone Company, Ltd., in London, Ives wrote on 12 June 1933: “Machinery! . . . I wanted to record (for my own observation) certain passages of piano things of mine . . . You get going, going good maybe the first time, as I did this a.m. Then the nice engineer comes back and says . . . the last part was not recorded. As I remember, the last part was the only part of the above ‘going good’ part. . . . The next record has to start in the beginning of the last measure – but how can you dive off a rock when you’re in the middle of the pool? . . . A man may play to himself and his music starts to live – then he tries to put it under a machine, and it’s dead!” Charles Ives, *Memos*, ed. John Kirkpatrick (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), pp. 80-81.

²*Charles E. Ives: Discography*, comp. Richard Warren Jr. (New Haven: 1972), entries 157, 375, 427.

³Notes accompanying Columbia Records’ *Charles Ives: The 100th Anniversary* (M4 32504, issued 1974).

EDITORIAL NOTE

We have tried to notate everything Ives played on the recordings of these improvisations. Three principal problems were encountered:

First, Ives's detailed and complex harmonies, such as those in the chordal section of *Improvisation I* (mm. 7-9) and in most of *Improvisation III*, could be notated after careful listening. But those that are blurred by melodic activity and pervasive pedaling above or below (as in *Improvisation II*, mm. 7-11) do not emerge clearly. Thus we have been unable to identify the precise pitch content of the left-hand chromatic runs in *Improvisation II*, m. 30, and of the low tone clusters in *Improvisation I*, last measure, and *II*, mm. 11 and 32. For the cluster in *II*, m. 11, it has been possible to determine the topmost pitches; the other clusters, however, are less distinct.

The second problem concerns rhythm. We have notated the music as it occurs metrically, or at least as it occurs with regard to accent. But it is possible, of course, that such a segment as *Improvisation I*, mm. 7-9, had a different accent pattern for Ives, or perhaps none at all. And even where the music is apparently conceived more distinctly from a metrical standpoint, Ives's use of *rubato* or rhythmic irregularity in performance thwarts easy notation (as in mm. 8-11 of *Improvisation II*). In all three works, bar lines and time signatures have been placed between rather than on the staves so as to preserve the fluidity of Ives's rhythmic and metrical organization. Two metrically free passages (*Improvisations I*, m. 6, and *II*, m. 11) have been left unbarred altogether.

Third, it is not always possible to determine the distribution of notes between the hands. For instance, although we believe the pitches and rhythms at m. 6 of *Improvisation I* to be accurate, we cannot be certain about the way Ives distributed the notes.

Analysts will find much about these improvisations that is orderly. This is perhaps most obvious in *Improvisation III*, with its establishment and retention of D as a tonic, with a dissonant, contradictory (but completely consistent) harmonic system superimposed. Ives's direction of his improvising shows interestingly at the end of *Improvisation II*, where he says, "Oh, that's the note there! My finger slipped on it," and strikes the high G alone to correct the Ab+G mistake.

Gail and James Dapogny

Three Improvisations for Piano

Transcribed and edited by
Gail and James Dapogny

CHARLES E. IVES
(1938)

I

(♩ = c. 60, but rubato)

The first system of the musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a *mp* dynamic. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it. The dynamic changes to *mf*. The time signature changes to 5/4, and the dynamic becomes *f*. The system concludes with a *pp* dynamic. Above the final notes, there are markings for *rit.* and *a tempo*.

The second system continues on two staves. It starts with a *mp* dynamic in 3/4 time. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above it. The dynamic changes to *mf*. The time signature changes to 2/4. The system ends with a *mp* dynamic in 4/4 time. Above the final notes, there is a marking for *molto rit.*

The third system is a complex piece of music on two staves. It begins with a tempo marking of (♩ = c. 120). The right hand (R.H.) and left hand (L.H.) parts are clearly indicated. The music features a *mf* dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system is characterized by dense, overlapping textures and includes markings for 8-measure phrases.

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8

dim. e rit.

(♩ = c. 48)

mp

poco ten.

mp

poco ten.

poco ten.

4/4

mp

3

3

3

dim.

pp

p

mf

* The upper notes (c-bb) are very faint.

(cluster of lowest keys)

II

(♩ = c. 120)

a tempo (♩ = c. 168)

(♩ = c. 144, subito)

(♩ = c. 120)

System 1: Treble clef, 5/8 time signature. Dynamics: *ppp*, *mf*, *mp (trem.)*, *dim.*. Bass clef, 2/4 time signature. Dynamics: *(sfz)*. Includes a 3/8 time signature at the end.

(♩ = c. 72)

System 2: Bass clef, 3/8 time signature. Dynamics: *pp*. Time signature changes to 2/4, then 3/8, then 4/4. Dynamics: *mf cresc.*. Includes a circled letter 'B' and a downward arrow with the text '(end trem.)'.

System 3: Bass clef, 2/4 time signature. Dynamics: *mf poco accel.*, *f marcato*, *a tempo*. Time signature changes to 5/8, then 6/4, then 3/4. Includes a triplet of 3 notes.

System 4: Bass clef, 3/4 time signature. Dynamics: *mp*, *mf*, *pp*. Time signature changes to 7/8, then 2/4. Includes a triplet of 3 notes.

System 5: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. Dynamics: *(R.H.)*, *(L.H.)*. Includes triplets of 3 notes. Bass clef, 2/4 time signature. Dynamics: *(L.H.)*. Includes a circled asterisk and the text '(low, white key cluster)'.

III

(♩ = c. 72)

poco accel.

4/8

mf

3 mp

3

3

3

(♩ = c. 60)

a tempo

4/8

mp

f

3

3

3

poco ten.

4/8

mf

mp

3

3

3