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CD Review by [James H. North](#)

N.B. The March in G and C is the name of one piece, not two.

IVES Varied Air and Variations. Waltz-Rondo.

Invention in D. Studies: No. 1; No. 2; No. 11; No. 4;

No. 5. Storm and Distress. Impression of "St.

Gaudens" in Boston Common. The Celestial

Railroad. Minuetto. 3 Quarter-Tone Pieces. 7

Marches for Piano. George IVES Fourth Fugue •

Donald Berman (pn); Stephen Drury (pn) • NEW WORLD
80618-2 (73:46)

New World Records has taken over for the now defunct CRI, which published Donald Berman's "The Unknown Ives" CD in 1999 (two reviews in *Fanfare* 22:6). I closed my review with: "I hope Berman will make it a series," and so he has. I could repeat everything Robert Carl and I said about Volume 1: Berman is a marvel, as editor, interpreter, and pianist. The subtitle of both discs is *Premiere recordings of unpublished works and new critical editions*, which explains why you may have heard much of this "Unknown Ives" before. The editions used, some still awaiting publication, are by several Ives scholars, those for *Minuetto* and the *Marches* by Berman. According to his program notes, the two discs represent all of Ives's short piano works—everything but the two

sonatas. Perceptive list readers will notice that the numbered Studies do not seem complete; James Sinclair's *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Music of Charles Ives* does not include Studies No. 3, 11-14, or 24-26; nor is there a March No. 5. As with Berman's previous disc, each work's musicological history, during the composer's lifetime and since, is discussed in the booklet.

Interspersed within *Varied Air and Variations* (1922—Berman notes that recent Ives scholarship dates works at their latest states) are "protests" ("nice and proper" music) from what Ives called the "sissies" in the audience. Rather than emphasizing the humor, Berman integrates them into the real meat of the piece, so that they too become variations. This produces a more unified work than we usually hear, while demonstrating that a coherent piece of music need not be all in one style. *Waltz-Rondo* (1911) is a rondo that begins gently but evolves into ever-more-complex bitonal music. Again, Berman plays down the jokes in favor of a convincing totality. *Invention in D* (1898) is a pleasing blend of Bach and popular tunes; Berman suggests that it may have been a homework assignment for Horatio Parker at Yale. Studies 1, 2, 11, and *Storm and Distress* are continuing explorations of the Emerson music of the "Concord" Sonata and the "Emerson" Overture. The St. Gaudens piece (1915) is

the original piano sketch for the first movement of *Three Places in New England; The Celestial Railroad* (1925) is related to the Hawthorne movement of the "Concord" Sonata. Both are particularly affecting in Berman's sensitive performances.

Minuetto, written when Ives was 12, is his earliest surviving score. While mimicking classical minuets, it already shows some signs of rebellion. From which we jump into some of Ives's most complex music: Studies 4 (1908) and 5 (1913) are atonal works built from 12-tone rows, using many of the techniques Schoenberg was soon to espouse. Yet they still come across as pure Ives; no one else could have written them. The quarter tone pieces (1924) are played on two pianos tuned a quarter tone apart. Other recordings have not captured the results, leaving me wondering what the fuss was about. Berman and Stephen Drury make it clear; perhaps their instruments are more accurately tuned. These pieces take some getting used to, no matter how many times one has heard them; nevertheless, extended listening suggests that Ives was so concerned with the tonal calculations involved that he neglected to put much music into these works.

Track 16 is a pleasant surprise: a simple, straightforward fugue by Ives's father, George, one of his "teaching pieces."

There follow six marches written by Charlie during his years at Yale (1895-1897), plus one more—"The Circus Band"—

from 1899. Most have appeared in various instrumentations, usually for band, but this is the first collection of them as piano pieces. They are delightful music, recalling Louis Moreau Gottschalk and looking forward to Scott Joplin, two important American composers whose music I love. The March in G and C closes with brief bitonal outbursts, but even they are mostly polite, "correct" music. Only the march with "Here's to Good Old Yale" resorts to cliché. Berman plays them with a broad, easy-going swing suitable for those two composers, but the mood seems too calm for the aggressive Ives; it would be interesting to hear them played in a more assertive manner. In 1943, the composer recorded a different version of March No. 6 (lacking the Yale tune); he does play with greater ferocity, but Berman is the far better pianist—at least in this case. These final 14 minutes (tracks 17-23) would make a great party record; they'll be dancing in the aisles! This disc is a must for Ives fans; much of it exudes so much charm that non-Ivesians may be equally pleased.

James H. North