

IVES *The Unknown Ives, Vol.2: 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.*¹ *7 Marches for Piano. G. IVES Fourth Fugue* • Donald Berman, ¹Stephen Drury (pn) • NEW WORLD 80618-2 (73:46)

Even though I reviewed Vol.1 of this series in 22:6, I somehow missed the second installment. But while teaching an Ives seminar recently, I came online upon Berman's recording of *The Celestial Railroad*, which led me back to this release. As a committed Ivesian, I'm amazed I hadn't already known it. At least I have the pleasure of discovering something afresh just when I thought I knew everything.

This disc was reviewed by James North in 28:3, and his excellent description makes detailed exegesis on my part unnecessary (and it made it easy to just copy his headnote). Suffice it say the following:

In terms of the music, this is a treasure house. *The Celestial Railroad* is a major work, that has labyrinthine ties to both the "Hawthorne" movement of the *Concord Sonata*, and the Scherzo of the Fourth Symphony. The *Impression of "St. Gaudens" in Boston Common* is the preceding version of the more famous first movement of *Three Places in New England*, and works beautifully as an American Impressionist solo piano work. The *Three Quarter-Tone* pieces are well-known, but this performance by Berman and Drury (another Boston monster new-music pianist) is as powerful as any; in fact there's something about the piece and its tuning that seems to make the two pianos turn into a giant "blue note". There are early works of Ives, the *Invention* and *Minuetto*, which show a precocious student mastering the norms of his time before shattering them. There's enormous humor in the 1911 *Waltz-Rondo*, as well as the six *Marches* based on popular sources that Ives wrote during his Yale years. They are a sustained hoot, and the ending of the one based on Handel's "See the Conquering Hero Comes" elicits a sustained guffaw. Study No.5 is six minutes of the most intense, uncompromising music the composer ever wrote, on a par with his *Browning Overture*. And then there's a short teaching piece Ives's remarkable father George wrote for his son, which gives us one of the few (the only?) examples of Dad's musical output, the shadow hovering on the edge of the great composer's life-portrait.

And in terms of performance, it's completely through the roof. There are times I really can't believe only one person is playing. Berman has all the notes down, and yet plays with an improvisatory abandon that makes me think he's possessed by Ives's ghost. The sound is spectacular, courtesy of Boston engineering guru Joel Gordon.

Several of these works are on other recordings, but this one gathers more into a single collection than any other. Bravo to all concerned; considering the quality of the rendition and presentation, this is a lifelong keeper. **Robert Carl**