

THE NEW YORK TIMES - THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2003

MUSIC REVIEW

*Two Yankee Iconoclasts Juxtaposed
on the Piano***By ALLAN KOZINN**

Carl Ruggles is often included alongside his friend Charles Ives in the pantheon of great Yankee iconoclasts, musical division. Yet performances of his works are woefully few, and recordings are hardly more plentiful.

This is a shame because Ruggles deserves his reputation as an American original. Like Ives, he was unconcerned with fitting into the mainstream concert world. He wrote what he wanted and often filed his scores away in various states of completion or revision, leaving it for editors to sort out posthumously, and for those interested to debate whether the editorial reconstructions should stand alongside the works he finished and published.

Donald Berman, a pianist who has long been fascinated with the early-20th-century New England School, presented all of Ruggles's piano music at the Miller Theater at Columbia University last Thursday, including the first performances of several reconstructions by John Kirkpatrick, the pianist who was essentially Ruggles's literary executor.

It still added up to a short program, so Mr. Berman played some Ives rarities, including studies and fragments related to the "Concord" Sonata.

was the more somber and thoughtful. As craggy as his music can be, little of it has the thumb-in-the-eye pranksterism that animates so much of Ives. Ruggles also tended to ind his own business: one doesn't hear extraneous hymns, marches and popular songs weaving through his scores, as they do in Ives.

Mr. Berman began with a transparent, thoroughly reasoned account of "Evocations," a set of four richly characterized pieces that Ruggles composed between 137 and 1954; his eloquent performance of "Affirmations," one of the Kirkpatrick reconstructions, supported the notion that it was meant to be a fifth "Evocation." Also among the reconstructions was a March (1940-3) that didn't add up to much, the harmonically inviting "Parvum Organum-Implication" and a "Valse Lente" (1945-50) that veered between French salon music and Ivesian dissonance.

Mr. Berman, joined by Christopher Oldfather, also gave a spiky, energetic performance of the two-piano arrangement of "Organum" (1944-46). With Daniel Stepner, the violinist, he played Ruggles's astringent "Mood" (1918) and the most winning of the Ives

The juxtaposition was telling: Ruggles and Ives had a lot in common, but Ruggles performances, the Violin Sonata No. 2 (1914).